

Krishna in his Myriad Forms: Narration, Translation and Variation in Illustrated Manuscripts of the Latter Half of the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

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ABSTRACT

Krishna in his Myriad Forms: Narration, Translation and Variation in Illustrated Manuscripts of the Latter Half of the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

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This dissertation focuses on a seventeenth-century (so-called) Malwa manuscript that illustrates the story of Krishna, and the copy manuscripts that were produced after it. It explores how the story is transformed in its incarnations as the vernacular text inscribed on the manuscript, the cycle of illustrations depicting that text, and then the copies made from what appear to be the initial illustrations. The claim is that narrative variations which find their way into these different embodiments should almost never be considered “mistakes,” even when an act of misunderstanding seems to be clearly implied. Rather they are moments when the artist’s or author’s engagement with contemporary sectarian concerns, literary trends, artistic strategies and popular culture is manifest. The first three chapters of the dissertation are devoted to an analysis of text, illustration and copy illustration respectively, while the fourth presents the broader context in which such Krishna manuscripts were circulating.

The underlying objective is to re-evaluate the conventional narrative of North Indian illustrated manuscripts. This is cast as the teleology of court styles where political history is used to decide important and influential ateliers. Visually compelling and historically important illustrated manuscripts such as the ones I study, but whose patronizing court is undecided, are largely ignored. This dissertation showcases an alternative, interdisciplinary approach that undertakes thorough visual and textual analyses alongside an examination of the broader socio-religious trends that impacted artistic production. It advocates that every illustrated manuscript should be studied individually, rather than as just a member of a predetermined stylistic group.

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INTRODUCTION

A Unique Illustrated Manuscript

During the course of his life, Krishna, one of the most beloved gods in the Hindu pantheon, marries over 16,000 women. In Plate i.1 he is shown successfully performing the prerequisite challenge to win the hand of Satya, the princess of Kaushal. The artist repeats the figure of Krishna who is recognizable by his blue skin color and peacock feather adornment. He depicts many episodes on the page, dividing it into compartments clearly distinguished by varied background colors to convey different moments in the story. The narrative starts in the top right blue section with Krishna's journey to the kingdom of Kaushal along with his entourage in order to marry Satya, the daughter of King Nagnajit. It moves left across the upper half of the page as he arrives at the palace and is treated with great respect by the king, who makes him sit on the royal throne. Seeing Krishna, Satya, in the bottom left corner, is delighted because he is the ideal husband that every woman desires. Her father tells Krishna that he has conceived of a task to test the strength and courage of Satya's suitors which involves defeating seven bulls. Krishna accomplishes this easily by assuming seven forms and besting all seven bulls simultaneously. The denouement of the story is in the bottom right corner of the image where Krishna marries Satya according to the proper rites and customs.

While Krishna appears ten times in this illustration, he is drawn just once in Plate i.2 from the same manuscript. Tucked away in a corner, we have to search before we spot his distinctive skin tone in the bottom left compartment. The subject here is the grand fire sacrifice performed by the Pandavas,¹ presided over by Krishna and attended by all manner of beings

¹ The Pandavas are five brothers who are the heroes of the *Mahābhārata*, the Indian epic that narrates the story of the great war between them and their cousins the Kauravas. Krishna is on the side of the Pandavas.

from gods and semi-divines to snakes and the demonic races. The artist achieves a symmetrically balanced composition by matching divisions and colors between the left and right sides of the page and turning almost every figure to face the action at the center. In contrast, a bright and unmodulated red is used for almost the entire background of Plate i.3 that portrays a terrific battle between Krishna's army and an opposing host. The only relief is provided by Krishna's capital, Mathura, represented as a checkered square on the left side of the page. Krishna and his older half-brother Balarama emerge from this city, riding their chariots as they meet their foes who charge from the right. Soldiers are unevenly arranged and arrows fly throughout the page, effectively evoking the chaos and confusion of battle.

These are just three examples from a manuscript where every one of its 116 leaves presents us with an image that is dazzling in its use of vibrant colors and unparalleled in its method of story-telling. No two illustrations appear alike, while within each painting, the story rarely follows a linear sequence, thereby creating a complex narrative structure. When I first encountered the manuscript in a private Indian collection, I was captivated by its striking juxtapositions and excited by its dynamism. But I was also perturbed because despite recognizing Krishna, the story did not make any sense to me and I could not identify the episodes presented.

Most popular versions of the Krishna tale (including the ones I was familiar with) follow a very neat chronology 'from Mathura and back.' They begin with Krishna's birth in Mathura, recount his exile to Gokula for his own protection as an infant, stay with him in the pastoral world and celebrate his sports there, and end with him returning to Mathura as a teenager to fulfill his destiny as an incarnation of Vishnu² by killing the evil king who is his maternal uncle

² The commonly held belief is that there are ten incarnations of Vishnu of which Rama is the seventh and Krishna is the eighth.

Kamsa. In these accounts Krishna is imagined as a mischievous butter thief who is a bane to the life of the women of Gokula but also their darling, a child with super-human strength who lifts up mountains and defeats numerous non-human adversaries and a flute-playing cowherd who flirts with all the cowherdresses.³ But we never meet Krishna the warrior as he leads armies onto the battlefield or the ideal husband that marries beautiful princesses as seen in the illustrations described above. Who is this other Krishna and where does he come from?

The Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is the most authoritative and highly venerated narrative of Krishna's life which it divides into the First and Latter Halves, the First Half presenting the better known cowherd Krishna while the Latter Half tells the less familiar story of the warrior and politician. Almost instantaneously after the slaying Kamsa, Krishna is transformed in the Latter Half into a responsible prince of Mathura (and soon after, Dwarka, where Krishna shifts the capital), the guardian of his subjects and the champion of his people, protecting them from all foes. Some episodes from the *Mahābhārata* are also referred to in the Latter Half. The later courtly aspect of Krishna's life has generated much less interest than his pastoral childhood and adolescence and I realized it is this part of his mythology that constitutes the subject matter of the exceptional illustrated manuscript I had chanced upon.

The manuscript in question is undispersed and located in the collection of Shri Vinod K. Kanoria in Patna, India—I therefore call it the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*. It has been categorized as Malwa style which, as I analyze later in the dissertation, presents certain challenges for anyone attempting to study it. The manuscript consists of 116 pages in a horizontal format, approximately 35x25cm., with image on one side and corresponding text in Brajhasha (early modern North India's main literary vernacular) on the reverse. This text is a complete vernacular

³ Krishna's role in the *Mahābhārata* as Arjuna's charioteer and general friend, philosopher and guide to the Pandavas is usually envisioned as a completely separate narrative bearing no connection to the flute-playing, butter-stealing figure.

re-telling of the Latter Half of the Tenth Book, only the second extant such work, the first composed just a year previously. There is a colophon at the bottom of the last page, now damaged, but with part of a chronogram still intact (Plate i.4). This contains the date associated with the manuscript which scholars have taken as 1688.⁴ The purported pair of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, an illustrated First Half of the Tenth Book, has an intact chronogram, published in the appendix of Anand Krishna's *Malwa Painting*,⁵ one of the few scholarly works dedicated to Malwa style manuscripts. It reads "*Samvata guna nigamani rishi chanda...*" which yields V.S. 1743 equivalent to 1686 CE according to the author.⁶ The method of arriving at 1743 is that each word indicates a number which are arranged in reverse order of the actual date: *guna* refers to the three *guṇas* or "qualities" discussed in Indian philosophical thought, *nigamani* implies the four *Vedas* as *nigama* is another name for *Veda*, *rishi* points to the seven great *rishis* or "sages" mentioned in Hindu literature and thought and *chanda* is the single "moon."⁷ This gives us 3471 or V.S. 1743 from where we arrive at the CE year by subtracting 57, according to convention. The collector, Mr. Kanoria, who has seen the undamaged colophon of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* some years ago, believes that the date was presented in a similar manner. All that survives of its chronogram is "*Sammata lai suta panda vidhi.*" *Suta panda* signifies the "sons of Pandu" and indicates the five Pandavas⁸ while *vidhi* denotes "rules," "regulations," "principles,"

⁴ The first scholar to mention this date is W. G. Archer in *Central Indian Painting*, London: Faber and Faber, 1958, p.5, but it is not clear if he had access to the complete chronogram or the damaged one as we see it now. There is the question whether 1688 is the date for the text or the illustrated manuscript. In my opinion, it is the date for the manuscript itself, thereby raising the possibility that the text was finished at an earlier date. But in the absence of a specific date for the text, I will treat 1688 as the date of its composition as well, with the caveat that further research could reveal an earlier date. I do not believe that the text was composed much earlier, in any case.

⁵ Anand Krishna, *Malwa Painting*, Benaras: Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1963.

⁶ Appendix "B", *Ibid.*

⁷ My thanks to Allison Busch (Columbia University) for helping with this analysis.

⁸ The name of their father was Pandu.

“conventions” or “injunctions.” To determine their number we probably require the word that comes after *vidhi*. *Vidhi* is also another name for Brahma, who has four heads.⁹ Mr. Kanoria’s recollection is that the date was close to that of its pair and the number should, therefore, be four, giving us the year V.S. 1745 or 1688 CE.

An important piece of information revealed by the manuscript is a salutation on the first page of text to Shrinathji, the main deity of the Vaishnava (associated with Vishnu) Pushtimarg sect, which says “*śrināthjī sahāī*” or “with the assistance of Shrinathji” (Plate i.5). The opening lines of the Brajbhasha text that occur immediately below the salutation also acknowledge the same personage. This suggests that the manuscript is associated with the sect in some way and provides a clue about possible patrons as well as the religio-social world in which it was a participant.

The Kanoria *Bhāgavata* is among a handful of dated manuscripts of the Malwa school and one of the few known works that illustrates the complete Latter Half of the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. It undoubtedly occupies a unique position in the history of North Indian illustrated manuscripts. I was therefore very surprised to learn that apart from the analysis of a few paintings, the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* has never been studied in its entirety or published. Is this because we are dealing with a part of Krishna’s biography that is not very well known or prevalent? Or is it a product of what I call the “Malwa problem” where manuscripts like the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, which do not fit into the conventional court-based classificatory system, are largely disregarded? These are two concerns that informed this project at its outset and I was interested in writing a dissertation that examines a historically important and visually breathtaking illustrated manuscript as it tells the unknown story of a ubiquitous and beloved god.

⁹ My thanks to John S. Hawley (Columbia University) for helping me with this analysis.

While conducting field work, I realized the entire Kanoria *Bhāgavata* (both text and image) has been copied and I unearthed the existence of two copy sets, dated to ca.1700. A few pages from a third set also survive, though executed in a distinct style and at a later date. Again, apart from a few paintings, none of the copy manuscripts have ever been studied or published and this is the first time that the relationship of copying between the manuscripts is established and investigated. This dissertation asks questions about the production and circulation of mythological manuscripts in early modern North India and evaluates the relationship between model and copy. A small part of it is also given over to the study of the Brajbhasha text inscribed on the reverse of the illustrations of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* (and its copies), a very significant work in the Brajbhasha literary canon which was unknown before this project.¹⁰ I refer to it as the Mahananda Latter Half because, as I discuss in a later chapter, Mahananda seems to be the name of the author.

Re-tellings

One of the objectives of this dissertation is to show how mythological stories change in their different “tellings” and to analyze the value of these multiple tellings as compared to their purported, usually Sanskrit, originals. The Sanskrit literature associated with Hinduism is broadly divided into *śruti* (“hearing”) and *smṛti* (“recollection”). The *Vedas* are the most important *śruti* texts while the epics and *Purāṇas*, which are the storehouse for a large proportion of Hindu mythology, belong to the class of *smṛti*. The conventional understanding of these categories is that *śruti* refers to divine revelation that contains eternal truths which are then

¹⁰ After I had embarked on my research, I learnt that Monika Boehm-Tettelbach (Heidelberg University) was looking at a small part of the text at the same time as me. We have been in regular touch and her interest is only in a few episodes whereas I have translated the entire text into English and studied it closely as a literary work and in relation to the illustrations. I have her blessing to make the text my own and am indebted to her for her insights.

explicated by humans in a comprehensible form in *smṛti* literature.¹¹ Sheldon Pollock, however, informs us that:

Nowhere in any shastric analysis of the nature of *smṛti*, then, do we find it juxtaposed to *śruti* the way Indology has always juxtaposed it, as inherently more recent, less authoritative, somehow independent and human in origin, and standing in opposition, or subordinate, to *śruti*.¹²

His own explanation places *śruti* and *smṛti* on an equal footing:

In short, *śruti* means nothing other than “(Veda) actually now perceived aurally (in recitation)”, i.e., extant or available; *smṛti*, nothing other than “(Veda) that is remembered”, i.e., material that, having once been heard in recitation is inferentially recoverable from present reformulations (in language or practice), which once existed as part of a Vedic corpus. Both refer in their primary connotation to one and the same thing – the Veda, as actually recited or just recalled.¹³

According to Pollock, the difference between the two classes is that *śruti* literature is preserved intact while *smṛti* has undergone change.

Only a select rarefied few were permitted to engage with the *Vedas* while in contrast, women and even the lowest caste of *śudras* were always allowed access to *smṛti* literature.¹⁴ This is one important reason why many *smṛti* works are written and/or recited in the vernacular from early on in their history, to ensure that the maximum number of listeners and readers, including the often unlettered lower classes could comprehend what was being said. The vernaculars were more widely understood than Sanskrit which many strata of society could not learn.

¹¹ For a succinct discussion see Thomas Coburn, “‘Scripture’ in India: Towards a Typology of the Word in Hindu Life”, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol.52, No.3 (Sep., 1984), pp.435-459.

¹² Sheldon Pollock, ‘The “Revelation” of “Tradition”: *Śruti*, *Smṛti* and the Sanskrit Discourse of Power’ in Siegfried Lienhard and Irma Piovano, eds., *Lex et Litterae: Studies in Honour of Professor Oscar Botto*, Edizioni dell’Orso, 1997, pp.395-417, p.411.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.408.

¹⁴ Mackenzie Brown quoted in Coburn p.440.

For the current study, we are primarily concerned with the *Purāṇas* from which we obtain the myths associated with Hindu deities like Vishnu, Shiva and Devi. It is generally believed that there are eighteen major and an equal number of minor *Purāṇas*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* belonging to the former category. There has been much debate from as early on as the nineteenth century about the dating, content and characteristics of these works, which need not concern us here.¹⁵ At present I will focus on one feature of the *Purāṇas* that help distinguish them from *śruti* literature like the *Vedas*: they have experienced changes to their form and content. “Even if they had a nucleus in the beginning and one or more specific authors, they went on changing continuously. Their concern has always been less to remain faithful to their contents than to their very nature of texts always under transformation.”¹⁶ What I am trying to get at is that while *śruti* literature has remained fixed and immutable, *smṛti* literature is more fluid and mobile.¹⁷

“The principal reason why puranic—and epic—stories can be treated with such a high degree of freedom is that, fundamentally, they do not belong in books.”¹⁸ The *Purāṇas* were circulating across the Subcontinent before the existence of printed books and the medium was initially oral transmission and later manuscripts, both illustrated and not. Unlike the *brāhmaṇas* who were preserving the *śruti* texts intact, it was primarily bards and travelling mendicants who narrated the stories of the *Purāṇas* to their audiences and usually in vernacular languages. Rather than reciting a text they were engaged in a performance that required an exercise of memory and

¹⁵ For a discussion of these debates see Ludo Rocher, *The Purāṇas*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986, pp.1-131.

¹⁶ Giorgio Bonazzoli, ‘Remarks on the Nature of the Purāṇa-s’, *Purāṇa* Vol.XXV, No.1 (January, 1983), pp.77-113, pp.78-9.

¹⁷ Coburn makes the point that some *smṛti* works function as *śruti* because they become canonical and are recited/repeated without any alterations.

¹⁸ Rocher, *Purāṇas*, p.53.

imagination according to the particular spectators for whom the story was being enacted. I believe it is this performative aspect of Puranic transmission that has had a tremendous impact on the lives of the *Purāṇas* as narratives. While basic plot lines and characters remain unchanged, individual bards and story-tellers invariably incorporated distinctive elements into their performances, and the idea that stories could be adapted to suit specific contextual needs persists in the myriad incarnations and embodiments of the epics and *Purāṇas* beyond oral tellings. The sort of change that was acceptable in oral performances was also permissible in textual and visual traditions and authors and artists felt free to use the material in their own way.

Ludo Rocher shows how in the nineteenth century *pandits* were changing details and even composing complete sections of the *Purāṇas* to meet what they perceived as the expectations of Western scholars who had requested their assistance in obtaining copies.¹⁹ While we are tempted to think of this as forgery or trickery, Rocher sees this as a continuation of the traditional mode of *Purāṇa* transmission where the bard or story-teller “could tell his stories differently according to the circumstances: adding a little, withholding a little, changing a little.”²⁰ And given the number of bards and *pandits* (and later vernacular authors and artists) who have, over the centuries, been engaging with the *Purāṇas*, and the many languages into which they have been translated, there exist numerous re-tellings of each and every one of them.²¹

¹⁹ Ludo Rocher, ‘Reflections on One Hundred and Fifty Years of Purāṇa Studies’, *Purāṇa* Vol.XXV, No.1 (January, 1983), pp.64-76.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.73.

²¹ According to Bonazzoli, among the factors responsible for transformations to the text are time, the different audiences and the varying points of view of the many authors. He shows how the Puranic literature itself shows an awareness of these factors.

In my estimation vernacular authors did not feel limited by the Sanskrit narrative or any other single text because that particular text might not constitute their source material. Writing in the twentieth century, Milton Singer presents the Indian situation rather evocatively:

There is a sense of intimate familiarity with the characters and incidents in the references made to Hariścandra, Rāma and Sītā, Krishna, Arjuna, and Prahlāda, as if the world of the stories were also the everyday world. Many children are told these stories from an early age by parents and grandparents, but this is by no means the only way in which they learn. The very tissue of the culture is made from purāṇic themes.²²

This feeling of a cultural intimacy with mythological figures is not merely a feature of modern society and was probably stronger in the early-modern period. Even if authors and artists had read the Sanskrit epics or *Purāṇas*, that was not how they knew their myths. They also encountered performances, vernacular compositions, poetry and works of art. These numerous founts that fed their imagination undoubtedly found a place in their literary and/or artistic production, making any re-telling of the epics or *Purāṇas* a coming together of many streams.

In his analysis of performance traditions related to, arguably, the most well-known early-modern vernacular translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic, the *Rāmacaritamānas* by Tulsidas, Philip Lutgendorf discusses one of the author's "most striking deviations from the traditional story."²³ Rama makes his way to Ravana's kingdom and rescues Sita, but in order to be sure of her purity, asks her to participate in a fire test. Sita must enter the fire and if she is unscathed, it would prove beyond a doubt that she is chaste, which of course is the case. Tulsidas introduces an illusory Sita who suffers all the hardships and indignities in Ravana's palace while the real one remains hidden in the fire, re-appearing after the purity fire test. This idea of two Sitas was derived from

²² Quoted in Rocher, *Purāṇas*, p.53.

²³ Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the 'Ramcaritmanas' of Tulsidas*, Berkeley" University of California Press, 1991, p.7.

a South Indian text,²⁴ a region geographically and culturally remote from Tulsidas. But it goes to show that the author is indebted to more than one source and each of them may find a place in the finished product.

What I am trying to emphasize is that most *smṛti* works that are available to us today, even if they are in the language of their so-called original composition, Sanskrit, have probably derived nourishment from multiple springs and have undergone some transformations. We must therefore be very careful about the terminology we employ and in the sorts of comparisons we make between the “original” Sanskrit and “derivative” vernacular versions. Even the so-called original Sanskrit texts might actually be re-tellings. In my study I will try and avoid the use of words that have a negative connotation such as corruption, deviation and distortion. Instead I consider every version to be a “re-telling” born of a process of “translation.”²⁵ The term translation is used not in its conventional but in its broadest sense to signify the creative processes involved in moving between languages, drawing on multiple sources and engendering a new work. Here translation does not signal a purely linguistic endeavor, and “language” implies myriad systems of signification such as the language of oral performance, the language of illustrated manuscripts and so on.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Ramanujan prefers the term “tellings” to “versions” or “variants” when he discusses the multiple *Rāmāyaṇas* that are available to us in different languages (p.24). According to him, the two latter terms imply that there is an original invariant one, which is not the case. I adopt a similar stance, but prefer “re-tellings” because the performance, recitation and narration of the stories has occurred over and over again down the ages. “Translation” is used by Barry Flood in ‘Refiguring Iconoclasm in the Early Indian Mosque’, Anne McClanan and Jeff Johnson, eds., *Negating the Image: Case Studies in Iconoclasm*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005, pp.15-40, and forms the basis of his *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval “Hindu-Muslim” Encounter*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Myriad Forms of Krishna

The title of this dissertation, *Krishna in his Myriad Forms*, is a bit of a play on words that implies the three embodiments through which the narrative of Krishna as the warrior and politician is presented in relation to the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*—the Brajbhasha text inscribed on the manuscript, its cycle of illustrations and the copies made after it.²⁶ I use the word embodiment in the sense of imparting a tangible physical shape to something that previously existed in the realm of speech and imagination and it is interchangeable with incarnation. The story of Krishna from the Latter Half of the Tenth Book is transformed as it incarnates in text, image and copy image and each of these contains an individual re-telling. I am interested in exploring the contours of the alterations and reflecting on how the vehicle that carries the narrative has an impact on it. Illustrations that are based on a text nevertheless shift and change the patterns of stress and importance, and copy images, which by their very nature should be identical in every aspect to their model, also modify the narrative.

Whether it is the cherubic infant, the flirtatious flautist or the unrivalled battle hero from the Tenth Book, or the canny politician of the *Mahābhārata*, we may encounter many different Krishnas.

It is a characteristic of the Hindu pantheon that the addition of new layers to a god's identity seldom wholly obscures the earlier strata; the forging of new relationships between god and god seldom severs ties of longer standing.²⁷

All these Krishnas represent different aspects of the same god and over the centuries the number of his forms as well as the mythology surrounding him has been multiplying. My title is also a

²⁶ I am treating the two copy sets as a single embodiment but this does not imply that they are the same. Each is an individualized work of art and is unique. For this project, however, the issues that are relevant in discussing them as copies are similar for both.

²⁷ Kenneth E. Bryant, *Poems to the Child-God: Structures and Strategies in the Poetry of Sūrdās*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1978, p.7.

gesture to this multi-faceted Krishna, whose lesser known sides this dissertation addresses. A third allusion I make with “myriad forms” is to Krishna’s *līlā* or divine play where he assumes as many forms as are required in order to perform the task at hand. The most renowned episode is from the First Half of the Tenth Book when on a moonlit night, Krishna dallies with the cowherdresses or *gopīs* in the forest. They all participate in a glorious dance where Krishna multiplies himself so that he can partner every woman. What scholars rarely mention is that Krishna performs the same miracle often in the Latter Half, for example to wed 16,100 princesses simultaneously, share domestic life with each of them or to defeat the seven bulls and marry Satya.²⁸ The lack of knowledge about and/or interest in the Latter Half is an issue that needs immediate redressing and is one of the goals of this project.

The first chapter of this dissertation briefly introduces the Latter Half of the Tenth Book and examines the cycle of illustrations built for the heroic and courtly Krishna. While the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* shares elements with a group of Malwa manuscripts, I believe the artist(s) had to conceive innovative ways of portraying the narrative because the Latter Half had rarely been illustrated previously. Some devices such as topographical alignment²⁹ are in evidence in other stylistically related mythological manuscripts, but often the Kanoria artist incorporates a singular way of delineating events that draws attention to his prodigious skill and imagination. Of great interest to me is the idea of visual legibility by which I mean the artist’s conscious attempts to repeat formulae within the manuscript in order to impart meaning to form and make the broad theme of the image immediately recognizable almost at a glance. By this strategy,

²⁸ It is interesting how all instances involve women.

²⁹ A term used by Vidya Dehejia in ‘The Treatment of Narrative in Jagat Singh’s “Ramayana”: A Preliminary Study’, *Artibus Asiae*, Vol.56, No.3/4 (1996), pp.303-324. The artist of the illustrated *Rāmāyana* dated to the mid seventeenth century from Mewar discussed by Dehejia is very concerned with topographical alignment and uses it to regulate the placement of Rama throughout the manuscript. Rama’s kingdom, Ayodhya, always appears on the right side of the page and Rama’s movements are from right to left across the page when he is leaving Ayodhya and left to right when he returns.

connections are made between episodes in the manuscript that might not be stressed in the text. With multiple different page compositions, tremendous dynamism and attention to detail, the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* is a compelling example of an artist's superior narrative techniques.

The second chapter focuses on the Brajbhasha text inscribed behind the illustrations of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, which I characterize as a re-telling in the vernacular of the Sanskrit Latter Half text, rather than as a translation from source-language to target-language. Through a comparison with the Sanskrit, which is not privileged as the original or authoritative text in my analysis, I explore the vernacular author's story-telling technique. The Brajbhasha text is an action-oriented narrative that eschews philosophy and descriptive passages in favor of compact presentation of events. There is less interest in singing the praises of Krishna than in telling readers how he acts. I consider how the text gives the artist cues about what should be included in the visuals and ask if this was a text composed mainly to be illustrated.

Copying constitutes the topic of the third chapter and my goal is to raise the question: what is a copy? While mechanical processes result in exact reproductions, copying by hand invariably leads to disparities between that which is copied and the copy itself. Should such variations be called errors, or taken as evidence of the copy artist's individual aesthetic preferences and of his being governed by canons that are distinct from the Kanoria artist? Can the copy be viewed as a creative work, leading to the paradoxical situation of artists innovating while reproducing? I argue that "narrative discrepancies" that find their way into the copies should not necessarily be considered mistakes, even when an act of misunderstanding seems to be clearly implied. Rather, they might be moments when the artist's engagement with contemporary sectarian concerns, literary trends, artistic strategies and popular culture is manifest. Alongside the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, I draw attention to the fact that other stylistically

related mythological manuscripts from the last quarter of the seventeenth century were also copied, raising the possibility that what we are dealing with here is a workshop whose production is at least partially regulated by demand rather than the requirements of a single patron.

Narrative is only one way in which the manuscripts make meaning and these three chapters will also delve into how the author, the artists and the copy artists navigate the literary and artistic traditions they are a part of. While the author of the Brajbhasha text is responding to the Sanskrit, he becomes part of the vernacular literary world by composing a Brajbhasha Latter Half and this text will be viewed alongside other vernacular Tenth Books to understand its place in the broader tradition. The artists of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* are guided by this vernacular text on which the illustrations are based, but the manuscript also has an identity as part of a workshop tradition and shares features with other mythological manuscripts. The copy artists negotiate between the demands of the model and the dictates of the idiom they are accustomed to, and glimpses of this process can be discerned in the copy manuscripts. Each of these chapters focuses on a complex set of factors that inform the production of an illustrated manuscript and the various domains in which it signifies. They simultaneously probe the meanings of the terms “translation,” “illustration” and “copy” that are integral to the analysis of manuscripts like the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*.

In my fourth chapter I discuss “the Malwa problem,” which is a product of the classificatory system that is used to study North Indian illustrated manuscripts. Their story is cast as a teleological narrative of court styles, where political history is used to determine the important and influential ateliers, resulting in a hierarchical categorization of artworks. According to this characterization, the Mughal empire’s political superiority over regional Rajput

courts translates into the predominance of its artistic output.³⁰ The model fails to account for manuscripts like the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* whose specific patronizing court is undecided, and labeling them as Malwa (a Mughal province comprising many smaller regional courts) on the basis of tenuous evidence, brands them as isolated and unnecessary to a broader understanding of India's artistic and cultural heritage. I argue that the existing framework which is court-based and privileges Mughal painting is ill-suited to discussing patronage of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and its copies. These works are better understood through an examination of the social and religious dynamics where a shared religious identity and a common vernacular language spurred their production and dissemination. The second half of the chapter will be utilized to lay out the socio-cultural context within which the Latter Half manuscripts circulated.

This dissertation does not resolve the Malwa problem by providing definite answers and firm evidence—it will not tell you who commissioned the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* in which kingdom. But it suggests that together with questions of style, date and provenance, we might probe the manuscript's connection to its contemporary literary world. It asks that we ponder the broader religious transformations occurring at the time and consider their possible impact on artistic production. By adopting such a cultural history approach alongside thorough visual analysis, the dissertation showcases an alternative method for the study of Malwa manuscripts. It also demonstrates that every discussion of Indian illustrated manuscripts need not make references to Mughal painting and no apology is made for the non-Mughal look of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*.

³⁰ The idea of "Mughal influence" is as old as Karl Khandalavala who states that Rajput painting would not have existed without Mughal painting. See his 'Leaves from Rajasthan', *Marg* 4, No.3 (Dipavali, 1950), pp.2-24, 49-56.

1: THE WARRIOR AND POLITICIAN IN PICTURES

Introduction

In the introduction to an excellent book that undertakes a wide-ranging exploration of the relationship between Classical art and text, Jocelyn Penny Small questions the assumption that pictures on classical objects are based on literary texts, and asks what it means to illustrate a text.¹ Small avoids the tendency to privilege word over image and re-examines evidence from antiquity in order to understand the actual relationship(s) evinced therein. Her hypothesis is:

Artists were illustrating stories, not texts. These stories were available from a number of sources: other artists, actual objects, performances of plays, oral tellings, and, to be sure, texts.²

Those of us that study Indian illustrated manuscripts might take a leaf out of Small's book and consider, "Were artists illustrating stories or texts?" It seems pretty straightforward that when text physically accompanies an image, which is usually the case in the Indian context, the latter will illustrate the former. But the situation is not as simple; manuscripts that depict mythological tales are often inscribed with Sanskrit text. Many artists, however, would not have been able to read and understand Sanskrit and would have to be told what to illustrate by someone else. This middle man could, on the one hand, give the artist minimal instructions, especially where a popular episode was concerned, and say "Draw a picture of Rama battling Ravana from the *Rāmāyaṇa*." We might recall the idea I discussed in the introduction about people's intimate acquaintance with mythical heroes in the early modern period. In such a cultural milieu, I believe that almost any artist would be able to portray the epic encounter without further

¹ Jocelyn Penny Small, *The Parallel Worlds of Classical Art and Text*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

² *Ibid.*, p.6.

guidelines³ due to a basic cultural familiarity with the major myths and stories. Rama will have a bow and arrow and be attended by his brother and an army of monkeys while Ravana with his ten heads will ultimately be vanquished. Of course, each artist will have his peculiarities about how to depict the ten heads and while one might arrange them in a single file, a second artist will pile them on top of each other, with the head of an ass at the pinnacle. But most artists would be conversant with the basic elements of the story, probably not just from Sanskrit texts, but popular sources such as those mentioned by Small.

On the other hand, the middle man might be responsible for familiarizing the artist with the story in greater detail and would have to recount it verbally in a language the artist could comprehend. This would be the case whether the text was in Sanskrit or vernacular, if the artist was unable to read fluently. Would the middle man present an exact linguistic translation of the Sanskrit/vernacular to the artist? Or is it more likely that he would be engaged in re-telling the story to the artist, either according to his own knowledge of it or based on the text at hand? And would the artist have a perfect memory so that he could remember everything exactly?⁴ Pictures may contain narrative elements external to the text inscribed on them because they are often founded on a re-telling of the text, rather than the text itself. Moreover, as is the case with the copies of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, artists often relied on other paintings, rather than the text for their work. It is impossible to state with surety that images always illustrate their texts and an examination of the “other sources” concerned is necessary if we want to fully understand the complexities of artistic production.

³ Sometimes illustrations will only have such a basic label inscribed on them and no other text. These might have served to tell the artist what to draw.

⁴ Even if the artist could read, his recall might not be perfect and he might also know the story from multiple sources.

The main source for the illustrations of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, however, is the text inscribed on their reverse, the Mahananda Latter Half. This does not imply that the artist(s) consulted no other sources; he does look at an earlier illustrated Latter Half as well as the many mythological manuscripts that were being made in the workshop, but the specifics of the story are from the Mahananda Latter Half rather than the traditional Sanskrit text or any other vernacular one. The precision with which text and image relate to each other raises an interesting question about process: how did the artist know what to illustrate? Was he literate and able to read the story himself? Was the middle man (men?) very closely involved while the artist was at work, supervising him at every step? And given the intricate nature of each and every image of the 116-page Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, how long did it take to complete the task?

There are different strategies artists employ to “translate” words into pictures—an artist depicting a mythological narrative might take the monoscenic route and depict a single moment from a story on a page. This could be the causal moment, the denouement, or an instant pregnant with possibilities. On the other hand, the artist might prefer to portray many moments from a story, starting with the trigger and tracing the unfolding of events to the finale.⁵ As this chapter will demonstrate, the artist of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* generally adopts the second path, presenting multiple snapshots together on a page that need to be “read” to grasp the narrative. His technique is not predictable one page to the next and the viewer is constantly challenged by new page compositions and different trajectories for the action. Foreknowledge or some other assistance is essential in order to follow the story. But the artist does help the viewer by

⁵ For a general discussion on how artists translate word into image see Meyer Schapiro, *Words and Pictures: On the Literal and the Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text*, Approaches to Semiotics Series, the Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1973.

providing recurring formal hints. For example, by repeating compositional formula for illustrations having similar subjects, the artist helps the viewer recognize them promptly.

Such connections that the artist makes between battle scenes or episodes of domesticity are not necessarily emphasized in the textual narrative:

While the pictorial and textual narratives recount the same basic story, there are visual devices and formulae used by the artists to convey ideas that cannot be expressed verbally. This is why the drawings must be understood as a form of translation rather than illustration. Formal elements such as composition, pose and particularly gesture are all used to create a visual narrative (as opposed to a series of static images), and to direct the flow of that narrative.⁶

Even though the illustrations are based on the text which contains implicit cues about what should be illustrated, the artist gives the narrative its own unique shape and creates a pictorial re-telling of it. He establishes visual links between pages and across manuscripts that are not made by the Mahananda Latter Half. This chapter will explicate such narrative strategies of the Kanoria artist after providing a brief introduction to the Latter Half of the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. For purposes of comparison, an illustrated First Half of the Tenth Book, a *Rāmāyaṇa* and a *Durgāpāṭha*, all executed in the same style as the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, will also enter the discussion.

The Latter Half of the Tenth Book

Textual narratives based on Krishna's life are numerous, and the earliest recorded one is believed to be from the *Harivaṃśa*,⁷ an appendix to the *Mahābhārata*. It contains two genealogies for Krishna: a description of the incarnations of Vishnu, of whom Krishna is one, and a history of the earthly clan into which he was born. A second narrative presenting Krishna's

⁶ Catherine E. Karkov, *Text and Picture in Anglo-Saxon England: Narrative Strategies in the Junius 11 Manuscript*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.36.

⁷ Thomas Coburn, "Scripture" in India: Towards a Typology of the Word in Hindu Life', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol.52, No.3 (Sep., 1984), pp.435-459, p.450.

biography is the Fifth Book of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, but perhaps the most comprehensive, authoritative and venerated account is from the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (“Legend of God”), which arguably functioned as the most important single narrative in early modern North India.⁸ All are composed in Sanskrit. Many of the episodes from Krishna’s life are common to all three, though their order might be changed. Some events, however, are unique to one particular work and each account is individualized, having its own specific character.⁹

In its entirety the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a compendium of Vishnu mythology. It consists of twelve *skandhas* or books and the first serves as an introduction to the eleven that come after by describing the circumstances that led to their narration. We are told that among the gathering of eminent sages in a forest is a *sūta*, a man praised by the sages, who will recount the exploits of Krishna and the other incarnations of Vishnu.¹⁰ Apart from such specific Vaishnava mythology, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* also contains dynastic lists and explains the creation of the earth and the movement of the planetary bodies. It concludes with prophecies about the end of the world. Of the entire *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* it is Tenth Book that is regarded as the most prominent—not only does it constitute about a third of the volume of all twelve books, but it leaves the others far behind if we look at the sheer number of its re-tellings. Moreover the Tenth Book has given rise to a large body of secondary literature such as commentaries and poetry based on specific

⁸ Guy L. Beck refers to the Krishna tradition based on these and other canonical Sanskrit texts as the “normative” one. See the introduction to his edited volume *Alternative Krishnas: Regional and Vernacular Variations on a Hindu Deity*, Albany: State University of New York, 2005. I find it problematic to club all these Sanskrit works together because they enjoy and have enjoyed very differing levels of currency throughout history. And even though they share certain characteristics they are somewhat distinct in how they present Krishna.

⁹ According to Noel Sheth, the *Harivaṃśa*, in contrast to the other two narratives, portrays Krishna as a hero even while recognizing his divinity. The two later works characterize Krishna as progressively more divine. See his *The Divinity of Krishna*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1984.

¹⁰ Certain sects regard Krishna as a deity in his own right and superior to Vishnu himself.

episodes. It is venerated by numerous Vaishnava sects and considered the most comprehensive account of the Krishna *avatāra* (“incarnation”).

The “traditional” Tenth Book is made up of ninety chapters and is differentiated into the First (Chapters 1-49) and Latter (Chapters 50-90) Halves.¹¹ It opens with Parikshit requesting Shukadeva to recount Vishnu’s descent in the dynasty originating from Yadu, reminding us that Krishna is an incarnation of Vishnu. Parikshit’s query provides us with a brief glimpse of what the Tenth Book will contain: he is eager to hear why Krishna moved to Braj, the reason for his slaying his maternal uncle, how many years he lived in Mathura and how many wives he had. At this point the Tenth Book provides the voice of the *sūta*, a narrator of a different time and place, to introduce Shukadeva’s response, moving unhesitatingly between the two narrative levels.¹² But it is through the speech of Shukadeva that we hear of the exploits of Krishna. In the First Half of the Tenth Book we are told about Krishna’s birth, his transfer from Mathura to Braj to safeguard him from his maternal uncle Kamsa, Krishna’s life in a rural idyll, Kamsa’s attempts to finish Krishna off with the help of many monsters that Krishna vanquishes, Krishna’s dalliances with the cowherding girls and his return to Mathura to slay Kamsa. In the Latter Half Krishna moves his capital to Dwarka and protects his subjects from numerous attacks, seeks out and defeats many trouble-making kings who threaten the well-being of mankind, marries over sixteen thousand princesses and has many sons and grandsons.

¹¹ This division is signaled not at the beginning of the Latter Half but in the formulaic chapter endings, where, from Chapter 50 onwards, the author states the chapter number, its broad subject matter and its place in the Latter Half of the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, as opposed to the First Half.

¹² Philip Lutgendorf discusses how in the *Rāmācaritamānasa*, Tulsidas sets up a four level “narrative genealogy” where Shiva is the “primal narrator” who relates Rama’s story to Parvati, and Tulsidas is the latest. All narrators remain “actively present throughout” and one of them is always speaking at at any given time. We can gauge the identity of the narrator through that of the listener. *The Life of a Text: Performing the ‘Ramcaritmanas’ of Tulsidas*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, p.24.

There is a clear divide between the First and Latter Halves in terms of geography, location, Krishna's foes and his interaction with women. The First Half begins in Mathura in a palace—Krishna is born in a dungeon because his parents were imprisoned by his maternal uncle Kamsa. But as early as Chapter 3 he is transported to the midst of a cowherding community across the river Yamuna in Gokula (later, when the community migrates, Vrindavana becomes his home), where he spends much of his childhood and youth. The First Half stays with Krishna in this verdant environment, surrounded by cattle, cowherds and the pleasures of rural life, with just brief references to the world of kings when Kamsa's evil stratagems are mentioned. Only towards the end does Krishna return to Mathura to defeat Kamsa and restore its rightful king, his (biological) grandfather Ugrasena, to the throne. The Latter Half begins in Mathura with the city surrounded by the mammoth army of Jarasandha¹³ that Krishna must defeat. A new capital city, Dwarka, is constructed in the middle of the ocean (to the west) and Krishna magically transfers his subjects there for their protection. Krishna spends the Latter Half in palaces, fortresses and courts, and never visits the pastoral world again.

In the First Half, Krishna encounters a host of enemies who are sent by Kamsa on a 'search out and destroy' mission. These disturbers of the peace, who are often in the guise of animals, appear singly. Kaliya the multi-hooded snake, Bakasura the gigantic heron and Vatsasura the demon in the form of a cow are some of the creatures Krishna dispatches easily. He also dispels natural disasters like forest fires and torrential rain and humbles the Vedic gods Brahma and Indra. There is strong evocation of the travails of rural life; snakes, out of control animals, floods and fires are regular occurrences in villages even today and can have a disastrous impact on communities. But the inhabitants of Gokula/Vrindavana have in their midst a divine

¹³ Jarasandha is the dead Kamsa's father-in-law who becomes Krishna's sworn enemy.

protector who looks after them unstintingly. In the Latter Half Krishna still acts as the guardian of his people but at the head of an army, in battle armor and astride a horse.¹⁴ He destroys huge forces that endanger his capital and vanquishes powerful kings like Jarasandha, Kalayavana, Bana and Shalva. And while some foes, like Bana who had a thousand arms, possess special powers, they are all human. The only person in animal form is King Nriga who had been turned into a chameleon for unwittingly misappropriating a *brāhmaṇa*'s property. He retains that shape until he attains salvation at Krishna's hands. Three separate episodes in the Latter Half also demonstrate Krishna's superiority over Shiva, whom he defeats in battle,¹⁵ rescues from a life-threatening predicament and bests by performing a seemingly impossible task.¹⁶

Krishna does not lack for women either in the First or the Latter Half. In the former he is an incorrigible flirt, stealing the garments of the *gopīs*, the women of the cowherding community, dancing with them on moonlit nights and captivating their hearts with his hypnotic flute. He dallies with them in forest bowers and on the banks of the Yamuna, never preferring one over the others for too long.¹⁷ The love of these simple, rural women for Krishna is all-encompassing and they express it unabashedly, pining for him when he is not in their midst. In the Latter Half Krishna does not dally or flirt but marries various princesses as would be expected of a prince of the Yadava clan. Over sixteen thousand wives, however, is not a "normal" number. Moreover, rather than arranged marriages, Krishna, in more than one instance,

¹⁴ Robert P. Goldman makes the point that in the First Half Krishna fights with his fists and it is only in the Latter Half that he uses weapons. See 'A City of the Heart: Epic Mathura and the Indian Imagination', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol.106, No.3 (Jul.—Sep., 1986), pp.471-483, pp.479-480.

¹⁵ Krishna and Shiva face each other on the battlefield because Shiva is sworn to protect Bana. The latter had earned Krishna's wrath by capturing his grandson Aniruddha.

¹⁶ One might consider whether sectarianism is a factor here. Goldman discusses a test of strength between the two divinities that takes place in the *Rāmāyaṇa* where again Vishnu's incarnation emerges victorious, p.476.

¹⁷ Radha is never mentioned.

kidnaps his willing bride. For example, Krishna responds to the entreaties of Rukmini and carries her away from her father's kingdom, which is a marriage of the *rākṣasa* type.¹⁸ Sixteen thousand of his wives are princesses who were held captive by the monstrous Naraka.¹⁹ Krishna liberates them all and weds them. The relationship between Krishna and his wives is described in more formalized terms and their interaction is usually confined to the palace where they enact the roles of royal householders. The love these women bear for Krishna, though, is not less than the peasant women and when Krishna once teasingly suggests to Rukmini that she take another husband, the princess faints from distress.

For Robert P. Goldman Krishna's entrance into Mathura is a turning point in his mythology that "marks a clear transition from the first to the second phase of his composite career and represents, symbolically, the passage that every human must make from the irrecoverable world of childhood fantasy and magic to the complex, difficult, but, alas, the real world of the adult."²⁰ In his perception, there is a Romantic sense of loss of an innocent, carefree time that can never be recovered once Krishna enters young adulthood, signaled by his physical journey to Mathura. Scholars have long wondered if what we are dealing with in fact is more than one Krishna "doubtless originally distinct heroes belonging to separate traditions of folklore and legend" that are "merged into one of the great hero-divinities of India."²¹ The personality and activities of the deity in the First and Latter Halves are distinct enough to lend some weight

¹⁸ Eight different types of marriages are described in the Gita Press translation of the Tenth Book, C. L. Goswami, *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, Part II, Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 2006, p.335.

¹⁹ In some accounts they are referred to as the daughters of Naraka.

²⁰ Goldman, p.482 .

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.482. Also see R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal. 2011, pp.35-38 and J. Estlin Carpenter, *Theism in Medieval India*, London: Williams & Norgate, 1921, pp.245-50.

to this hypothesis. In the discussion of illustrations that follows, I try to focus on those aspects of Krishna that are unique to the Latter Half, such as the battle hero and the ideal husband.

The Manuscripts

Using four known dated examples including a 1634 *Rasikapriyā*, a 1652 *Amaru Śataka*, a 1680 *Rāgamālā* and the 1688 Kanoria *Bhāgavata* with its purported pair, the 1686 First Half, Anand Krishna was the first to posit a chronology of Malwa manuscripts and discuss stylistic connections between them.²² This has since been refined by Joseph Dye.²³ Anand Krishna regards 1650 as the moment when two distinct styles can be discerned: Group A which retained “archaic traditions” and Group B that adopted Mughal features. The larger number of manuscripts in the former style led him to conclude that it was the more popular one, while the Mughal-influenced manuscripts were made for rich patrons. Group A is further divided into manuscripts of a “high evolved form” which includes the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, and a second more popular style. There are some problems associated with Anand Krishna’s identification of the 1686 First Half pair of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*. There exist two almost identical manuscripts of the First Half of the Tenth Book and either could be the 1686 First Half bearing the chronogram he has published. As Anand Krishna does not differentiate between both these First Halves, it is difficult for us to do so. In my opinion, neither of them is the pair of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and should, instead, be linked with the two copy sets made after it.²⁴

²² Anand Krishna, *Malwa Painting*, Benaras: Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1963.

²³ Joseph M. Dye, *The Chronology and Stylistic Development of Seventeenth Century Malwa Painting*, PhD dissertation, IFA, New York University, 1980.

²⁴ This raises questions about the dating of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and I cannot arrive at any definite conclusions without seeing the 1686 colophon page and the illustration. It is possible, as I mentioned earlier, that 1686 and 1688 are the dates associated with the text rather than the manuscript. Or perhaps the 1686 chronogram is located on a third First Half manuscript which is the actual pair of the 1688 Kanoria manuscript, on which the two First Half copies are based.

Based on shared features, Anand Krishna gathers together a group of manuscripts that he associates stylistically with the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* including a *Rasikapriyā* (Kala Bhavan Museum, Varanasi), a *Rāgamālā* (National Museum, New Delhi), a *Rāmāyaṇa* (National Museum, New Delhi) and a *Kṛṣṇalīlā* (National Museum, New Delhi).²⁵ He also mentions a *Durgāpāṭha* (National Museum, New Delhi)²⁶ in the more popular Group A style.

Joseph Dye undertakes meticulous connoisseur-like analysis of motifs to tease out manuscripts that are stylistically and temporally linked and groups them in clusters around the four known dated Malwa manuscripts.²⁷ His Fourth Group are the manuscripts related to the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* in which he includes the *Rāgamālā* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* mentioned by Anand Krishna and does not leave out the *Durgāpāṭha* as evincing a different more popular style. To these he adds two more *Durgāpāṭhas* from the National Museum and one from the Kala Bhavan Museum and two manuscripts depicting the First Half of the Tenth Book (National Museum, New Delhi), bringing it to a total of ten manuscripts. The *Kṛṣṇalīlā* and *Rasikapriyā* cited by Anand Krishna as part of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* group are classified by Dye as related “but possess more refined execution and a somewhat cooler palette.”²⁸

Of all these manuscripts, the ones I will consult are:

1. First Half of the Tenth Book (National Museum)—which I will refer to as the National Museum First Half (Plate 1.1). It can be distinguished by the preference for blue backgrounds.

²⁵ It is possible he actually means the First Half of the Tenth Book here.

²⁶ By *Durgāpāṭha* both scholars refer to manuscripts which illustrate the *Devī Māhātmya*.

²⁷ Dye, *Chronology*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.350.

2. First Half of the Tenth Book (National Museum)—which I will refer to as the National Museum First Half [monoscenic] (Plate 1.2).²⁹
3. *Rāmāyaṇa* (National Museum)—which I will refer to as the National Museum *Rāmāyaṇa* (Plate 1.3).
4. *Durgāpāṭha* (National Museum)—which I will refer to as the National Museum *Durgāpāṭha* I (Plate 1.4).
5. *Durgāpāṭha* (National Museum)—which I will refer to as the National Museum *Durgāpāṭha* II (Plate 1.5).

The logic behind my selection is twofold: first, all the manuscripts I have chosen to deal with illustrate mythological subjects which would make comparison with the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* more fruitful and second, I agree with Dye’s assessment that all these manuscripts are stylistically related and were probably produced in the same workshop within a short span of time.³⁰ The visual analysis I present below helps bear out this conclusion.

At this point, it is necessary to distinguish between manuscripts that are stylistically related and ones that are copies because many manuscripts from this group, including the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, were copied, though not necessarily in the same workshop or by the same artists. Even though “similarity” is the issue in both cases, what the similarities tell us about methods of artistic production is distinct. Molly Emma Aitken interprets style as “psycho-motor realities” or “habits of the hand” that inhere in the artist as a result of long years of repetitive

²⁹ Many of the illustrations are monoscenic unlike the National Museum First Half.

³⁰ I have only examined a handful of leaves from the National Museum *Durgāpāṭha* I and am not completely convinced that it was produced by the same artists as the other five manuscripts (including the Kanoria one). But until I have studied more illustrations from it I will refer to it only briefly for the sake of comparison. I temporarily defer to Dye with the caveat that further examination may lead to the conclusion that it cannot be included in the group.

training.³¹ It would be second nature to an artist to draw in the style that he was taught. Artists working in a single workshop would often be trained to work in a similar style which could be a court style to fulfill the requirements of a particular powerful patron, or a family style. But when the allegiance of a workshop, whether to a patron or the painter's family, is not known, as is the case here, we may designate the style as the workshop style. The group of manuscripts I have clubbed together are stylistically related as a result of being produced by a group of artists who probably learned their craft in an almost identical manner.

Copying, on the other hand, implies a purposeful resemblance that is not necessarily instinctive and it might involve working in a style which is not the one an artist is trained in. There is a sense of deliberate effort in such look-alikeness and most importantly, there must always be a source that serves as a model to be copied. The third chapter focuses on issues related to copying through a discussion of the two copy sets made after the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*. The two First Halves, either of which could be the 1686 manuscript, bear a strong resemblance to the National Museum First Half and one other additional dispersed First Half, to the extent that a relationship of copying also exists there. Additionally, the National Museum *Rāmāyaṇa* and the National Museum *Durgāpāṭha* are also part of model-copy couples. In this chapter, for the most part, I will try to avoid discussing the copies and compare the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* to the five manuscripts listed above. Nevertheless I include a list of copy manuscripts which will constitute the main subject of the third chapter. The two copy sets made after the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* are:

1. The Dispersed Kala Bhavan Latter Half.
2. The Dispersed Seitz Latter Half.

³¹ Molly Emma Aitken, *The Intelligence of Tradition in Rajput Court Painting*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010, p.87.

The two First Half sets (one of which bears the date 1686) that are stylistically related to the two Latter Half copy sets but represent the First Half and bearing a likeness to the National Museum First Half are:

3. The Dispersed Kala Bhavan First Half.
4. The Dispersed Seitz First Half.

And the third dispersed First Half manuscript also resembling the National Museum First Half is:

5. The Dispersed First Half, evincing a similar predominance of blue.

Workshop Practices

The knowledge we have at present about the operation of painting workshops in early modern India tells us that a group of artists would be involved in producing a manuscript and often, more than one painter would be responsible for completing a single illustration. I am less interested in identifying the different hands and enumerating the number of artists who concerned themselves with the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, than in understanding how the manuscript was worked on and its linkages to other manuscripts that were made in the same workshop. What I present here is not an exhaustive analysis of each and every motif I have examined, but a brief taste of a more expanded process that should nevertheless help me make my point.

The figure of Krishna, whose representation is not consistent for the duration of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, bears testimony to the fact that the same artist did not delineate him throughout.³²

³² It is also possible that an artist changed his manner of depiction, but I believe this is less likely.



Figure i



Figure ii



Figure iii



Figure iv

Immediately we will notice that while our protagonist's mauve skin color is similar in Figures i, ii and iv, the Krishna in Figure iii is a darker blue. In Figure i, Krishna has a moustache that is not seen in any of the others, while in Figure ii he has a prominent peacock feather (also see Plate 1.8).³³ The peacock feather, an almost ubiquitous part of Krishna's iconography in contemporary popular imagination, can be seen adorning his head throughout the National Museum First Half (Plate 1.6) as well as in the National Museum First Half [monoscenic] (Plate 1.2).³⁴ In the First Half Krishna is not eligible to wear a crown because he has not yet assumed his role as a prince of the Yadava clan; hence the presence of non-royal accoutrement. But its occurrence in the Latter Half hints that an artist who drew Krishna in a First Half manuscript may have now been employed on the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and continued to represent Krishna as he had previously, *sans* golden crown but crowned with a peacock feather.

In-depth scrutiny of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* will reveal further information about the myriad hands and sensibilities at work. For example, a minute change takes place in the

³³ It is a common practice in North India illustrated manuscripts to have the protagonist change costumes for the duration of the manuscript and sometimes even in a single illustration. It is not necessarily suggestive of different artists. But changes in skin color and facial hair occur less frequently.

³⁴ Scanning the images of the National Museum First Half we will notice that the peacock feather is delineated differently throughout the manuscript.

illustrations of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* starting around Chapter 78: small golden tufts of grass are seen to be dotting the background in between the actors in the paintings (Plate 1.7). They occur in Chapters 78 and 79, disappear for the next four chapters and reappear in Chapter 84 till the end of the manuscript. Similarly formed tufts of grass do appear in other places in the manuscript, but these are usually done on blue backgrounds (occasionally on brown, green and black-colored backgrounds) and are almost always red in color (Plate 1.8). After Chapter 78, however, the tufts take on the character of an all-over pattern that covers every inch of the unpeopled surface. The copy sets made after the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* are also decorated with such gold-colored bunches that seem to serve an ornamental rather than a representative function. A second design-related change I have discerned appears around Chapter 70, a little more than halfway through the manuscript. It has to do with the canopies that hang from ceilings inside palaces and mansions, which appear to incorporate the motif of the grass tuft at this midway point. While the pattern never occurs earlier in the manuscript, once it is used it becomes the favorite, recurring much more often than any other canopy trim (Plate 1.7). Such connoisseur-like analysis of images is not futile and gives us a clue about the distribution of labor within the manuscript. In the case of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, more than one artist handled the figure of Krishna, backgrounds and canopies.

Shared elements between multiple manuscripts produced in a workshop suggest that the same artist was employed in their production. I will examine horse-drawn chariots in my group of six manuscripts, paying specific attention to the number of horses and their coloring. In the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, the chariots are always pulled by two horses and in almost every case, they are of unlike colors, with one painted white (Plate 1.9). The horses in the two copy sets of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* are portrayed in a similar fashion. Turning our attention to the First Half

manuscripts, we will notice that in the first part of the National Museum First Half, the chariots are drawn by a single horse (Plate 1.1), whereas in the last quarter, there are two horses of different colors (Plate 1.6).³⁵ The National Museum *Rāmāyaṇa* also has the dissimilarly colored pair of horses (Plate 1.3). What this comparison shows is that while within a single manuscript the same artist may not have been responsible for executing the horse-pulled chariots throughout as is the case with the National Museum First Half,³⁶ the fact that they are depicted in an analogous manner in different manuscripts suggests that either the same artist or the same workshop produced all the manuscripts. Many other tertiary elements, such as arches with stairs in them, suggesting an open doorway with a glimpse inside are found in the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, the National Museum First Half and in the National Museum *Rāmāyaṇa*.³⁷

One last comparison between the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, the National Museum First Half and the National Museum *Rāmāyaṇa* will show that an identical arrangement is used to portray the same subject across manuscripts, suggesting that particular snapshots were conventionalized within a workshop or were the work of one artist. When a mother is depicted with her newborn child, she adopts the same pose in all three manuscripts, whether she is the mother of Krishna, Rama or Pradyumna (Krishna's son). Plate 1.10 depicts the celebrations that take place in Gokula when Krishna is born and in the top left corner we see Yashoda (Krishna's foster mother) lying on her back in bed with the blue-skinned infant Krishna in a cot that is hung from the ceiling. Yashoda's right arm is bent at the elbow and appears to be folded under her chin while

³⁵ The Dispersed First Half, which shares a relationship of copying and predominance of blue with the National Museum First Half, also has pairs of horses but of the same color. This assessment, however, is based on a single image. See 'Krishna rescues his guru's son' (*Bhāgavata Purana*, Tenth Book, First Half, Chapter 45), ca.1690, LACMA 1995.220.2.

³⁶ It is rare that two parts of a single manuscript would be done in different workshops.

³⁷ Undoubtedly, Dye has already covered some of this ground but because he had access to only a few leaves of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, I feel it is necessary to investigate again.

her left hand rests on her thigh. Only her bust is exposed while the rest of her body is covered by a white blanket with a green and pink pattern. An attendant approaches from the right to complete the vignette.

The exact cameo appears three times on a page in the National Museum *Rāmāyaṇa* to announce the births of Rama and his three brothers to the three queens Dasharatha.³⁸ The only difference is in the depiction of the queen who has twin sons—one is in a cot while the other sleeps beside her. In the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, the mother and child are Rukmini and Pradyumna, and the depicted episode is the kidnapping of Pradyumna by Shambara. On the left side in Plate 1.11, above the water, we will notice that Shambara has replaced the attendant and stretches out his arms for his victim from the right. The infant Pradyumna is not hanging in a cot but rests in his mother's embrace from which he is removed. The figure of the mother, however, is unchanged, though her blanket has a black design.³⁹ She is portrayed in the same position as the other mothers, even as her child is snatched from her arms. Copies made after this image leave out the left arm resting on the thigh. A study of wedding scenes from the three manuscripts also reveals shared features that suggest an existing formula for their depiction.

In my estimation the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, the National Museum First Half and the National Museum *Rāmāyaṇa* were produced in the same workshop as similar page compositions, arrangements of figures and decorative details are in evidence in all three. Unlike the copies made after the Kanoria manuscript that do not display the same ease with line and form, these three were produced by artists who had been trained in a similar manner. In fact I would go so far as to say that the National Museum First Half and the National Museum *Rāmāyaṇa* were

³⁸ See Plate XIV in D. Khare and M. D. Khare, *Splendour of Malwa Paintings*, New Delhi: Cosmo, 1983.

³⁹ My impression is that the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* was executed more quickly than the other two, and therefore less attention is paid to the prettiness of design.

executed by the same artists within a short time span of each other. The National Museum First Half [monoscenic], the National Museum *Durgāpāṭhas* I and II are the products of the same workshop, but are not as closely linked as the other three manuscripts. What follows is an analysis of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* with particular attention to its organization, use of color and page design and layout. Other mythological manuscripts will also enter the discussion for purposes of comparison.

Planning and Layout

The numbering of the 116 illustrations of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* begins at one, indicating that the manuscript is conceived of as an independent entity and not as a continuation of a First Half, an impression that is also conveyed by the text whose introductory salutary couplet signals that it is a stand-alone literary creation and not the pair of a First Half. The folios are horizontally oriented, about 35x25cm., with image on one side and corresponding text on the reverse. Chapters with the fewest lines⁴⁰ are given only a single illustration but occasionally, one with 27-30 lines will also be assigned only one picture. The maximum illustrations are not devoted to chapters with the greatest number of lines. The table below gives us an outline:

Chapter number and brief subject matter	Lines per chapter	Illustrations used per chapter
50 Battle with Jarasandha, building Dwarka	33	6
51 Destruction of Kalayavana by Muchukunda	14	1
52 Krishna runs away from Jarasandha	19	5
53 Krishna carries away Rukmini	25	4
54 Krishna disgraces Rukmi and marries Rukmini	16	3
55 Pradyumna's birth, Shambara killed by him	20	3
56 Syamantaka gem	28	4
57 Syamantaka stolen, thief killed	21	3
58 Eight marriages of Krishna	32	7
59 Naraka killed, 16,000 marriages of Krishna	28	6
60 Dialogue between Krishna and Rukmini	11	1

⁴⁰ "Line" refers to a *dohā* or rhyming couplet while referring to the Mahananda Latter Half. A couplet is counted as a single line, in the manner that it is numbered in the text.

61 Krishna's progeny, Rukmi killed	23	4
62 Aniruddha made captive by Bana	20	2
63 Aniruddha rescued	28	5
64 Story of King Nriga	18	1
65 Balarama diverts the Yamuna	14	2
66 Paundraka and others killed	22	3
67 Dwivida killed by Balarama	15	2
68 Balarama drags Hastinapura	32	4
69 Krishna's household life	24	3
70 Krishna's daily routine	20	2
71 Krishna goes to Indraprastha	20	3
72 Jarasandha killed by Bhima	29	2
73 Krishna returns to Indraprastha	13	1
74 Shishupala killed	31	2
75 Duryodhana humiliated	21	2
76 Shalva's encounter with the Yadavas	20	2
77 Shalva killed	21	2
78 Balarama's pilgrimage where he kills a <i>sūta</i>	33	2
79 Balarama's pilgrimage	30	4
80 Sudama visits Krishna	27	1
81 Krishna eats parched rice brought by Sudama	21	1
82 Krishna meets people from Vrindavana	35	3
83 Draupadi talks to Krishna's wives	30	1
84 Krishna's pilgrimage	38	3
85 Krishna brings his brothers back from the dead	25	1
86 Arjuna carries away Subhadra	39	3
87 Question about the <i>Vedas</i>	10	1
88 Krishna helps out Shiva	35	3
89 Krishna brings back dead sons of a <i>brāhmaṇa</i>	48	5
90 Krishna's story narrated	42	3

The least number of lines used to delineate the events in a chapter are in Chapters 87 and 60 with 10 and 11 lines respectively. Each of these chapters is allotted one illustration. The next four chapters with the least lines as compared to the others, Chapters 51, 65, 67 and 73 have either one or two illustrations assigned to them. It seems that when a chapter in the Brajbhasha text has few lines, it also has limited illustrations. This does not mean that all the longer chapters employ many illustrations; some of them are also restricted to a single illustration and this mainly occurs in the later part of the manuscript from Chapter 80 onwards. The result, however, is not rushed

executions or overly crowded compositions as one would expect if either time or pages had become a constraining factor. Perhaps it has to do with division of labor within the workshop and a separate individual taking over the planning of the last part of the manuscript.

Some *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* manuscripts will indicate chapter beginnings and/or endings in the illustrations by including a snapshot of Shuka and Parikshit in conversation. As discussed earlier, Shuka is the narrator of the work and the chapters of the traditional Tenth Book open with the dialogue between him and his single person audience, Parikshit. By inserting Shuka and Parikshit into the painting, the artist reminds viewers of the narrative structure of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. In a *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* set made in Datia ca.1800, Shuka and Parikshit are always portrayed in a separate architectural structure at the top center of the page, though they are not present consistently at the start or finish of every chapter. Chapter 37 of the First Half of the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* consists of three main events: Krishna's killing of the horse-demon Keshi, Narada's visit to Krishna (mentioned in the previous chapter) and the defeat of Vyoma and Plate 1.12 from the Datia set depicts the last two. Shuka and Parikshit are separated from the rest of the action which unfolds across the painted surface. To the immediate left of their pavilion are Krishna and Narada talking in the shade of a tree while the entire lower part of the page is taken up by the Vyoma episode.

What is of particular interest are the Brajbhasha labels in black that dot the Datia image, either identifying the main players such as Shuka, Parikshit, Narada and Krishna, or giving the gist of the action. An example of the latter is seen floating above the heads of Krishna and Narada sitting under the tree which says "Narada narrates the future to the lord (Krishna)."⁴¹ The labels are provided in addition to the corresponding Sanskrit text that is written on the reverse of

⁴¹ Translations my own unless otherwise indicated.

the image. Perhaps they were meant to aid a patron in reading the image more easily, but they create an overall impression that the Brajbhasha words are uttered by Shuka who is seated there, engaged in the very task of narrating the story to Parikshit and like the latter, the viewer seems to be “listening” to the tale through Shuka’s voice. In the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, however, the interaction between Shuka and Parikshit is never shown, implying that the framing dialogic structure of the Tenth Book is not at all important for the artist. His primary concern is conveying the main happenings of Krishna’s life which he does with tremendous dynamism and skill, utilizing line, space and color as the building blocks of an extremely sophisticated narrative language.

Background Colors

The feature occurring in many Malwa manuscripts that is always noticed and remarked on by scholars is the use of flat, bright colors to delineate the background.

...the bold expanses of unmodulated color that fill the window, arched door, and areas immediately to the left of the building. Such color fields are accorded greater importance in seventeenth-century Central Indian pictures than they are in any other school of painting. Whether enlarged, shrunk, subdivided, or multiplied, these areas of intense color are never absent: it would seem a Central Indian picture was not regarded as a complete work of art without them.⁴²

In manuscripts like the National Museum *Durgāpāṭhas*, a single or maybe two primary colors are used while in the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, the page is divided into numerous compartments that are done in three or four different preferred tones. Rarely is there an illustration where one color suffices. Referring to what he calls the “color field”, Dye says:

Opaque and impenetrable, this ground is painting reduced to its primary form—to absolute, pure color. The various pictorial elements, with their patterns and decorations, stand in marked contrast to its intense, accentless surface.

⁴² Joseph M. Dye, *The Arts of India: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*, London: Philip Wilson, 2001, p.314. As I discuss in a later chapter, “Central Indian” and “Malwa” are often used interchangeably by scholars.

Of utmost importance is the color field's independence. Its solid, usually geometric shape and its size give it a strength and self-sufficiency equal to that of the elements that it holds. Although surrounding the figures, the color field is not subordinated to their form or movements.⁴³

Dye's description is a formal one based on his assessment of many Malwa manuscripts and he celebrates the strength and independence of the bright backgrounds. Anand Krishna also enjoys the striking juxtapositions and referring specifically to the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* concludes that "the strong colour-contrasts add significantly to the attractiveness of the scenes."⁴⁴

Most scholars focus on the pictorial aspects of background colors such as their brightness, intensity and combinations. Few have investigated further to seek a deeper logic behind how the artists use background colors to serve a narrative function as well. It is not just a question of making the illustration more attractive or using color to distinguish between many different episodes on a page, but a way for the artist to signal the passage of time. Chapter 55 tells the story of the abduction of Krishna's infant son Pradyumna by the demonic Shambara, an episode which is depicted in Plate 1.11. Shambara throws Pradyumna into the sea with the intention of killing him, but Pradyumna gets swallowed by a fish which is brought to Shambara's palace by a fisherman. The infant is discovered and Pradyumna grows up in the palace without Shambara's knowledge. He is under the care of Rati who teaches him magical spells by which he can defeat Shambara. Pradyumna ultimately vanquishes his kidnapper before returning home with Rati. On the left end of the bottom red register of Plate 1.13 the blue-skinned Pradyumna walks up to the seated Shambara and incites him to violence by hurling insults at him. At the center of the register Pradyumna and Shambara are engaged in a mace fight and Shambara has already suffered an injury on his head which is bleeding. On the right Pradyumna beheads his

⁴³ Dye, *Chronology*, p.366.

⁴⁴ Anand Krishna, p.28.

nemesis with a sword as the gods rain flowers down on him from the heavens. Here are three distinct moments presented together in a single register that is uniformly red in its background color because they occur within a short span at the same location.

The artist suggests unity of time and place by bringing together different actions in a single compartment. There is an uninterrupted flow between the events which would be lost if they were divided from each other by changed background colors, giving rise to what Vidya Dehejia calls “continuous narrative.”

In continuous narrative, successive events of an episode or successive episodes of a story are depicted within the single enframed unit of the page, repeating the figure of the protagonist in the course of the depiction. Consecutive time frames are presented within a single visual field without any dividers to distinguish one time frame from the next, and the action flows "continuously" across the page; however, temporal succession and spatial movement are clearly indicated. The comprehension of continuous narrative requires awareness that multiple appearances of the protagonists indicate successive spaces in which the action occurs, as also successive moments of time.⁴⁵

Maintaining a single background color as the protagonists travel across the space supports the artist's use of continuous narrative.

A similar tactic is noticed in the portrayal of Duryodhana's humiliation in Chapter 75.⁴⁶ Duryodhana visits the divinely constructed palace of his cousins the Pandavas and becomes extremely jealous due to its grand splendor. In Plate 1.14 we have the Pandavas' council hall covering the left half of the page with Krishna seated at its center. Duryodhana enters the palace in the bottom right register with a brown background, completely baffled by the palace's unusual architecture. He is depicted three times: on the extreme right he steps into water mistaking it for the floor and gets his clothes wet, in the center he lifts up his clothes to prevent them from

⁴⁵ Vidya Dehejia, 'The Treatment of Narrative in Jagat Singh's "Ramayana": A Preliminary Study', *Artibus Asiae*, Vol.56, No.3/4 (1996), pp.303-324, p.305.

⁴⁶ Duryodhana was the eldest brother of the Kauravas who fought against the Pandavas in the great war described in the epic *Mahābhārata*.

getting wet in water when no water is present, and on the left he stumbles and falls, his delusion becoming a source of amusement for everyone else. Three linked actions that happen close together temporally and within the same space are depicted without any partitions.

The same strategy is employed in the National Museum First Half where the artist conveys unity of time and space by not changing the background color and depicting many incidents of a story in a single compartment. Chapter 15 of the First Half tells the story of Balarama defeating the ass-demon Dhenuka and this is depicted in the bottom half of Plate 1.15. The tale unfolds from left to right, with Balarama catching hold of the ass-demon's legs on the extreme left, swinging him over his head, and ultimately throwing him into a tree as the cowherds celebrate his victory on the extreme right. Again, the artist brings together separate moments in one monochrome register to convey their connectedness and consecutive occurrence.

On the other hand, the Kanoria artist will use two different colors in a single compartment or register to indicate movement across great distance or a lengthy span of time. This is akin to Dehejia's "linear narrative" where the artist presents successive episodes and repeats the protagonist as in continuous narrative but "Scenes are separated from one another by a variety of compositional means, and generally each episode is contained within a separate frame."⁴⁷ Division in the examples discussed here here is made by means of color change.

Chapter 52 opens with Krishna and Balarama fleeing before the forces of their old enemy Jarasandha. Plate 1.16 shows Krishna and Balarama climbing up a mountain to escape on the left half of the image. They are depicted a second time standing at its summit, while their enemies, identifiable by their grotesque heads, are setting fire to the mountain. In order to get away, Krishna and Balarama execute a huge leap off the top of the eighty eight miles high mountain

⁴⁷ Vidya Dehejia, 'On modes of Visual Narration in Early Buddhist Art', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Sep., 1990), pp. 374-392, p.386.

and land on the plains far away, evading both the fire as well as their tormentors. The brothers are portrayed a third time in the middle of the page with their arms raised above their head and legs folded, a position adopted while jumping distances. There is a change in the background color from the blue that was behind the mountain to black, reinforcing the fact that the brothers have covered an enormous distance in their jump. The pair appears for the fourth time inside a palace on the right deep in conversation. While the brothers are climbing up the mountain and waiting at its peak, the unity of time and place is maintained and the artist does not alter the background color. When they traverse a vast expanse of space, however, the background color changes in tandem. And lastly, the brothers occupy a completely discrete compartment, inside the palace, when a new episode is recounted.

A second example is from Chapter 57, which tells us that while Krishna is away in Indraprastha, the capital of the Pandavas, one Shatadhanva kills Krishna's father-in-law in order to steal the precious Syamantaka gem he has in his possession. Hearing this, Krishna and Balarama immediately return to Dwarka with the intention of avenging the death and killing Shatadhanva. In the top register in Plate 1.17 the brothers are sitting in a chariot and moving towards Dwarka on the left. Learning of Krishna's purpose, Shatadhanva gives the gem to a friend for safe-keeping and leaves the city on a horse. The bottom register of the image consists of two background colors, blue and brown, which should be read as a transition of time and/or space in the recounting of one main episode, the killing of Shatadhanva. On the left side with the blue background, Krishna and Balarama chase the murderer who is jumping off his exhausted horse to persist in his flight on foot. The color change tells us that Krishna has pursued Shatadhanva over some distance and for a considerable period of time into the brown area on the right where Krishna is depicted three times and Shatadhanva once. The three actions of Krishna

in the brown zone are: beheading Shatadhanva with his discus,⁴⁸ searching his clothes for the gem and turning away from the body to return to Dwarka. Since these three activities take place within a few moments of each other, they are depicted in a single brown plane, implying unity of time and place.

A last example will help strengthen my hypothesis. Chapter 58 begins with Krishna's journey to the Pandava capital of Indraprastha. Plate 1.18 represents Krishna's progress from Dwarka, represented by the palace on the left, to the Indraprastha palace on the right, and the affectionate embraces shared by him and the Pandava brothers upon his arrival in their city. Of interest is the central vertical panel between the two palaces: the artist of the Kanoria set uses the blue background to depict Krishna and his retinue on their journey, while in the red area Krishna is variously greeted by the five Pandavas. According to their respective ages Krishna touches the feet of two brothers older than him, embraces Arjuna who is of the same age as him and receives obeisance from the youngest twins. The artist has innovatively composed the page to incorporate the two cities on either side of an irregular central arrangement within which the distinction between the journey and the destination is maintained. Change in color here is used to suggest a movement in terms of both time and place and without placing figures far apart, the artist nevertheless indicates that Krishna and his entourage have traveled some distance from Dwarka before meeting the Pandavas at Indraprastha. If we observe just the red area in the central vertical panel of the page, where Krishna meets the five Pandava brothers, we will notice that Krishna is depicted four times. In the same illustration where the artist uses different colors to suggest a change in time and space, he will depict a figure multiple times in a single compartment in order to make clear that those actions are taking place in the same location and within a short span of time.

⁴⁸ The discus is one of the attributes of Vishnu and often used by Krishna against his enemies.

Placing blue and red sections next to each other on a page undoubtedly produces a vibrant and eye-catching image, but it is important to move beyond such observations in order to perceive that form echoes content. The artist employs background color as a narrative tool—painting the many compartments on a page that portray distinct scenes in different colors is quite straightforward, but the decision to suggest continuous action by repeating the protagonist multiple times in the same color field is a more subtle utilization of the element. This strategy is used liberally throughout the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* as well as in the National Museum First Half. The second tactic I discussed however, where an alteration of color within a register underlines extensive physical and temporal progress, is found only in the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, giving us some insight into the artist’s refined narrative technique.

Battle Scenes

In the Latter Half of the Tenth Book, the princely Krishna dons the mantle of a warrior and leads his army into numerous campaigns, unlike the First Half that contains no clashes between hosts.⁴⁹ The Kanoria artist’s talent is obvious in his imaginative and detailed conceptualization of battle scenes, each of which is individualized according to textual specifics.⁵⁰ In the very first chapter of the Latter Half, Krishna must meet the armies of Jarasandha that surround his capital city Mathura. Six illustrations are used to depict the entire chapter, but the actual battle takes place on the third page (Plate 1.19). Krishna and Balarama attack from their chariots on the left while the enemy charges from the right. The artist has visualized the textual metaphors of “bloody rivers,” “cut hands that seem like fish (in the bloody rivers)” and “wave-like bows” that are used to describe the scene. He also adds, in the top left

⁴⁹ Discussed earlier in the chapter—all of Krishna’s victories in the First Half are the result of hand-to-hand combat against monstrous enemies that appear singly. There are no armies he has to face.

⁵⁰ When I refer to the text in this chapter I mean the Mahananda Latter Half.

corner, the women of Mathura on their terraces who, believing Krishna to be dead when they cannot spot him in the rising dust, faint in distress. Any viewer familiar with the text would instantly recognize the particular battle represented.

In some manuscripts, when depicting scenes of a similar nature, an artist will often repeat page arrangements. For example, two images from the National Museum *Durgāpāṭha* I are very alike in layout, with the multi-armed goddess astride her lion mount on the left and her heavily armored nemesis riding a horse facing her (Plates 1.4 and 1.20). The supporting actors are also distributed in a corresponding manner with a monkey at the top center and three soldiers in the bottom right. One extra soldier is seen in Plate 1.20 holding an umbrella over the enemy's head thereby indicating his high rank. The encounters are represented using “stock scenes” that are made specific through the presence of labels and the use of “salient details” like the umbrella and the number of the goddess' arms.⁵¹ Without the assistance of labels and salient details that cause the portrayal to refer to a particular confrontation, the two images are almost interchangeable. It is the labels that inform us that in Plate 1.4 the goddess is facing Dhumralochana while in Plate 1.20 she is clashing with Shumbha. The umbrella over Shumbha's head reminds us that he is a leader of the *asuras* (beings engaged in a constant struggle for power with the gods).⁵²

In the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, however, such repetition is absent and in each instance the artist constructs the page anew. The only way in which the battle scenes echo each other is in their use of horizontal registers to convey the action, though there are a few exceptions. I will present a discussion of illustrations that depict the conflict between opposing forces on an open

⁵¹ In her discussion of classical art, Jocelyn Penny Small makes the argument that writing is necessary for our understanding of classical and without labels a large number of scenes would never be identified. This is because artists used stock types for the depiction of popular scenes like chariot races. The presence of a salient detail, according to her, suggests that the artist was working with a particular text that contained a reference to that detail. See her *The Parallel Worlds of Classical Art and Text*.

⁵² The goddess has four arms in Plate 1.4 and eight in Plate 1.20 which might inform us which specific form of the Goddess is being depicted.

battlefield, where the main event is the actual clash. These invariably utilize the horizontal register format. Left out are one-to-one combats and instances when a single protagonist faces a rival host that do not adopt the arrangement. In Chapter 54, Krishna is compelled to fight the kings and princes who were invited to the wedding of Rukmini and Shishupala. These friends of the bridegroom are enraged when Krishna abducts Rukmini from their midst, carrying her off on his chariot, and decide to teach Krishna a lesson. In Plate 1.21 the artist divides the page into three horizontal registers filled with warriors that shoot arrows, draw swords and behead their foes. Krishna is depicted on the right end of the middle register drawing his bow, while Rukmini sits behind him. His prowess is too much for the kings who are defeated and flee the battlefield. On the left side of the page, the armies are facing the opposite direction, turned away from the actual combat in order to show that they are retreating.

The three register format is activated again to represent the confrontation between Krishna and Bana's forces (Chapter 63), the latter having earned Krishna's enmity by making his grandson Aniruddha captive. Bana was a great devotee of Shiva and had secured the boon of Shiva's eternal protection. As a result, Shiva is also part of Bana's entourage and is embroiled in a terrible encounter with Krishna. In Plate 1.22 we see the two divines facing each other in the middle register. On the left Krishna is drawing his bow and on the right Shiva is riding his bull Nandi and wielding his trident. A second clash takes place at the left end of the bottom register between Krishna's son, the blue-skinned Pradyumna, and Shiva's six-headed son Kartikeya who rides a peacock. In the top register, a part on the upper left side is taken up by the gods who watch the fight between Krishna and Shiva, while on the right is Satyaki fighting the thousand-armed Bana. In this page and the next, Krishna's troops are always attacking from the left while

Bana's host is on the right. The artist has brought together many individual encounters that often occur simultaneously in the different areas of the battleground.

On the next page, however, this system of depicting multiple concurrent vignettes is not maintained, even though the three register format persists (Plate 1.9). In the top register the battle between Krishna on the left and Shiva on the right continues and both utilize divine weaponry against each other. The text tells us that against Shiva's Vayavastra ("wind weapon") Krishna employs the Parvatastra ("mountain weapon"), Shiva's Agnivana ("fire arrow") is neutralized by Krishna's Meghavana ("cloud arrow"), and finally Shiva's own Pashupatastra ("weapon of Shiva," Pashupati is another name for Shiva that means "lord of animals") is rendered ineffective by Krishna's Narayanastra ("weapon of Narayana," Narayana is another name for Vishnu). Based on names of these extraordinary missiles the artist clearly delineates each of them with its own special features. For example, Shiva's "fire arrow" with flames rising from it is countered by Krishna's "cloud arrow" depicted as a long dark rain cloud. The middle register is not a second encounter that is taking place at the same time on the field, but the next episode in the story where Bana angrily decides to take on Krishna himself. He uses his thousand arms to draw five hundred bows, but Krishna proceeds to cut them off and would have ultimately killed Bana had the latter's mother not interceded. She appears on the battlefield naked, knowing that Krishna will not raise his eyes to look at her, allowing Bana the opportunity to escape. Two discrete contests are depicted in the lower register: on the left Balarama kills two demon-headed foes while on the right Pradyumna drives away Kartikeya. The denouement of the battle presented on the next page also adopts the three register format.

My third example is from Chapters 76 and 77 that describe the conflict between the Yadavas and the forces of Shalva. Shalva was a companion of Shishupala's who obtains a

magical flying vehicle with which to defeat Krishna and avenge the humiliation suffered by his friend. Krishna is away from Dwarka at the time of Shalva's first offensive when the latter's army surrounds the city and he is met by Pradyumna. Plate 1.23 shows a page divided into three horizontal registers with Shalva depicted many times, riding his aerial vehicle. The text says that the magical vehicle could traverse water, mountains and sky and in the top register, the artist depicts it three times, on the left filled with water, on the right atop a mountain, and in the middle with a distinct blue color inside it, different from the background green of the register, suggesting the sky. The next moment in the story is portrayed in the bottom register where Shalva wreaks havoc among the Yadava soldiers who assault his vehicle from the right. Thereafter, in the middle register, Shalva's minister injures the blue-skinned Pradyumna with a mace, causing the latter to faint. In order to save Pradyumna's life, his charioteer takes him off the field, which is depicted by turning the chariot in the opposite direction away from the encounter. On this page the Yadavas are always depicted on the right.

For the next two illustrations, the artist divides the page into two horizontal registers and the Yadava onslaught is again from the right side of the page. In Plate 1.24, in the top register, Pradyumna is shown defeating the minister who had injured him while in the lower register the Yadavas kill many of Shalva's men who then fall off the aerial vehicle into the ocean below. In Plate 1.25 Krishna returns to Dwarka and rushes to meet the enemy, fighting with Shalva in the top register, while in the bottom register he is shown ultimately destroying the magical vehicle and killing his nemesis. Both Krishna and Shalva are repeated many times on the page. In the top register Krishna's chariot is shown twice and he is depicted three times, twice on the same chariot at two different moments, first aiming an arrow at Shalva's vehicle and then dropping his bow due to an injury inflicted by Shalva. In the bottom register Krishna is again portrayed twice

on his chariot using his mace to destroy the aerial vehicle whose broken pieces lie in the ocean. Shalva, launching his offensive from the left side of the page is depicted multiple times on his flying vehicle and then on foot before his head is cut off by Krishna's discus.

The Kanoria artist evinces a decided preference for the register format in his delineation of warfare that involves two armies meeting on the battlefield.⁵³ But in each case, the number of registers, the distribution of figures, the placement of protagonists and the arrangement of the supporting actors is changed according to the particular requirements of the specific battle. Nowhere does he use stock imagery to which he adds salient details but rather conceptualizes each encounter individually. There is also no definite system to the way events are portrayed on a page—the artist might illustrate a single snapshot of the battlefield where many pairs of warriors are engaged in combat or the different registers may carry the story forward representing distinct chronological moments. These moments need not be arranged in a linear progression and the narrative, on occasion, moves from top to bottom to middle register, or crisscrosses across a single register.

Different modes of narration are employed with great skill and the artist's goal seems to be creating a dynamic and exciting image that manages to capture the movement, chaos and energy of battle. The synoptic mode of narration occurs when different episodes from a story are presented within a single frame but their sequence is not clearly communicated and the conflated mode when the single protagonist participates in more than one scene on the page.⁵⁴ In the battle depictions of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* more than one mode may be utilized within a single register leading to a highly complex visualization of the story. For example, in the bottom register in

⁵³ The one occasion where the register format is not used is discussed later. This is in the episode of Paundraka where the artist has a completely distinct goal in his page composition.

⁵⁴ Dehejia, 'Treatment of Narrative.'

Plate 1.25, Shalva is depicted multiple times which can be confusing as the order of events is not clear from the illustration. Only a viewer who is aware that Shalva first attacks sitting in his aerial vehicle and then on foot before being decapitated can decipher the sequence of events as they are illustrated. Krishna is depicted twice on the right side of the register, using a mace. But it is one of these Krishnas that also releases the lethal discus that will cut off Shalva's head. Instead of representing Krishna again the artist has employed conflation.

Krishna might appear on the right side of the page or on the left—one side does not consistently belong to Krishna throughout the manuscript. Within the same chapter, however, Krishna's forces always occupy the same part of the page which is often related to the depiction of their city in that chapter. In depicting the battle with Shalva, for instance, because Dwarka is depicted on the right in the first image of the chapter, the Yadava armies are always on the right side of the illustration. Again, in the clash with Bana, Krishna and his followers charge from the left and this is because in the first illustration they emerge from their city is on the left, making their way to Bana's capital to rescue Krishna's grandson. There is internal consistency in every chapter based on the location of cities, a device that Dehejia calls "topographical alignment."⁵⁵ The images from National Museum *Durgāpāṭha* I described at the beginning of this section (Plates 1.4 and 1.20) evince a similar logic, with the goddess always appearing from the left. This principle is also at work in the National Museum *Durgāpāṭha* II. In the National Museum *Rāmāyaṇa*, on the other hand, Rama attacks Ravana from the right side of the page (Plate 1.3) while he strikes Kumbhakarna (Ravana's brother) from the left (Plate 1.26) but without studying more images from the set, it is premature to guess at the *Rāmāyaṇa* artist's attitude towards topographical alignment.

⁵⁵ Dehejia, 'Treatment of Narrative', pp.306-7.

Pilgrimages and Domestic Scenes

The use of registers for battle scenes is not an arbitrary choice; the horizontal field creates an impression that the action extends past the margins of the page and that the fighting persists beyond what the eye can see. The same layout is used when the artist has to illustrate a long journey or a pilgrimage, where the protagonist travels across the Indian subcontinent visiting multiple religious sites. The number of registers, however, is always four, in contrast to battles where it is usually two or three. Chapter 79 describes the pilgrimage that Balarama undertakes to atone for killing a *sūta* and lists the numerous sacred rivers he bathes in, the many holy cities he visits and the renowned sages he pays his respects to as he makes his way from the mountains in the north to the ocean in the south of India. The artist uses two folios for Balarama's journey, dividing each into four horizontal registers and incorporating, on an average, four separate vignettes in every one (Plates 1.27 and 1.28). The register format evokes the sense of distance traversed and continuity which is ideal in representing a long pilgrimage that stretches over two pages.

The list of places inscribed behind Plate 1.27 is as follows: Balarama offers obeisance to sage Pulaha at his hermitage, bathes in the rivers Gomati, Gandaki, Vishala and Shona, goes to the city of Gaya, bathes in the Ganga at its mouth, visits Parashurama at Mahendra mountain, bathes in the seven streams of the Godavari and the rivers Vena, Pampa and Bhimarathi, pays homage to Shiva's son Karikeya, bows to Shiva on Shri mountain, heads south to the Dravida territory, sees the Kinkata mountain and stops at cities bearing the name Kanchi where he bathes in the Kaveri river.⁵⁶ Following the order presented in the text, we start at the top left of the image and work our way downwards, right to left in the second from top register, then left to

⁵⁶ Translations of the Mahananda Latter Half throughout this dissertation are my own. My translation of the complete Chapter 79 can be found in the next chapter of the dissertation.

right in the one below and left to right again in the bottom register. The artist clearly delineates water bodies, mountains and personages corresponding to the text, as well as the proper activity performed by Balarama at each location.⁵⁷

When the artist moves indoors and portrays scenes of domesticity, he prefers a completely different format. Multiple snapshots nestled in separate compartments are arranged on a single page which helps conjure up the enclosed space of the palace interior.⁵⁸ In Chapter 61 we have a description of how Krishna's 16,000 (and more) wives serve him and try to make his home life exceedingly comfortable and pleasure-filled. Even though attendants are present, the ladies do everything by their own hands from pressing Krishna's feet, fanning him and bringing him food. The chapter also tells us about Krishna's many children—each wife has ten sons. Plate 1.29 is divided vertically into two halves: in the twelve rooms on the left are Krishna's many wives catering to his every need while of the nine compartments on the right, Krishna is at the center surrounded by his wives with their children. The slightly altered arrangement between the two halves is done on purpose because the narrative on both sides is different. But the multi-compartment format tells us that they are all domestic scenes. Chapter 69 is an account of Narada's visit to Dwarka in order to catch a glimpse of Krishna as a married householder. The great sage visits the mansion of one wife after the other and in each of them he finds Krishna who has magically assumed as many forms as he has wives. He is bathing in one mansion, playing with his children in a second and feeding *brāhmaṇas* in a third. Plate 1.30 is again made up of multiple rooms which are meant to be the various mansions visited by Narada. In all of them Krishna is engaged in domestic activities witnessed by the sage.

⁵⁷ In the next image the correspondence is not as exact but still very close.

⁵⁸ Maybe where greater restrictions on behavior are in force than on the battlefield?

I am fascinated by the idea of visual legibility and how artists, by adopting certain fixed arrangements for the delineation of scenes of a similar nature and repeating them, either within a manuscript or in many, can train the eye of the viewer to recognize meaning in formal arrangements and not just in subject matter.

With pose, as with composition, repetition can be used as a type of rhetorical device to establish relationships between particular scenes or figures.⁵⁹ The use of topographical alignment, a change in the background color within a single compartment, or the presence of multiple compartments or registers in any illustration can become clues that guide the viewer on how to read an image. The viewer is able to identify patterns and associate them with specific themes,⁶⁰ such as multiple compartments with domesticity or a particular side of the page with the protagonist, and for manuscripts produced within the same workshop, such visual knowledge is often applicable beyond one single manuscript.

This is related to the idea of “genre styles” discussed by Aitken, where similar subjects share formal characteristics across Rajput (a class of Hindu warrior princes) court ateliers:

Equestrian portraits always showed a ruler moving across the page with a bevy of attendants; they were informational, where a woman bathing was a harmony of seductive curves caught in a cross fire of gazes through open windows and doors...one can often say at glance what a Rajasthani picture is about because its story is its form.⁶¹

Visual legibility is also a factor here—the recognition of familiar forms is needed to reveal the main theme of the image. Aitken’s discussion, however, is much broader in its scope and pertains to subjects that are invariably found in every Rajput court. I am examining a single manuscript for the most part, with occasional references to others produced in the same

⁵⁹ Karkov, p.40.

⁶⁰ And also perhaps with specific artists.

⁶¹ Aitken, p.71.

workshop and trying to show that even when the Kanoria artist repeats formats, we never get the impression that he is using stock imagery. Every image is always fresh and individually conceived according to the requirements of the text.

Unique Pages

Certain stories in the Latter Half prompt the Kanoria artist to conceptualize unique illustrations where the structure of the page echoes its content and together they carry the narrative very effectively. Chapter 66 recounts the encounter between Krishna and King Paundraka of Karusha who calls Krishna an impostor, alleging that he carries false emblems in his four arms to appear like Vishnu. In reality it is he, Paundraka, who is Vishnu, the protector of the universe. The deluded monarch sends a messenger to Krishna's court with the same message, asking him to discard his fake guise or face the consequences. This angers Krishna greatly and he decides to wage war on Paundraka and teach him a lesson. Krishna marches on Kashi with his armies where Paundraka is staying with his friend, the king of Kashi. Paundraka appears on his chariot bearing all of Vishnu's own emblems, the conch, discus, sword and bow, facing the lord who also carries the same.

In order to highlight this twinned appearance of Krishna and Paundraka the artist has divided the page in Plate 1.31 vertically into Krishna's and Paundraka's camps, and the representations in the two halves mirror each other closely, except for the Krishna's distinctive blue complexion. In the upper register, Krishna's council hall is on the left and Paundraka's on the right, with the messenger depicted twice moving between them. Both council halls have similar numbers of councilors and attendants, with Krishna and Paundraka facing each other. Both carry the discus, conch and lotus. In the lower register, Krishna, who is on the left side of the page, rides his chariot and attacks Paundraka on the right, and the two sides practically reflect

each other. This mirroring of the left and right or of Krishna's and Paundraka's sides of the page accentuates the notion of the mimicry attempted by Paundraka.

This mirroring of left and right is continued to the top half the next page (Plate 1.32) where Krishna decapitates Paundraka. An important distinction between the two sides, however, is the king's beheaded body as opposed to Krishna's whole one. In the lower register Krishna defeats the king of Kashi and here the visual correspondence between left and right is abandoned as the king of Kashi did not attempt to look like Krishna. In this case, the mirroring would not have served any narrative function. It would appear that the artist carefully composed the page to serve not just aesthetic but also story-telling purposes.

The Kanoria artist's singular use of the surface of the page is in evidence in many other illustrations. Chapter 59 tells the tale of Krishna's fight with the evil Narakasura whom he defeats and from whose harem he rescues sixteen thousand one hundred princesses. He sends all the women to Dwarka and once he returns he marries them according to the proper rituals. Krishna, who was capable of performing miracles due to his divine nature, assumes as many forms as there are brides and marries each of the rescued princesses at the same time. Thereafter he accompanies them to their palaces where each wife serves one of his sixteen thousand one hundred forms, falsely assuming that she has Krishna all to herself. Depicting sixteen thousand and one hundred scenes of wedding rituals and marital bliss is near impossible on one page. But the artist solves the problem by using the tactic of visual suggestion. He divides the page into eighteen compartments: the nine on the left each depict Krishna performing wedding rituals with a princess while the nine on the right show the newly wedded brides serving their husband (Plate 1.33). The effect is one of weddings stretching indefinitely on the left, beyond the margin of the

page, and scenes of wife looking after husband on the right. We might mark that the artist has employed the multi-compartment format for these domestic snapshots.

This impression of multiple weddings and pictures of conjugal happiness is further enhanced due to its contrast with the following page. Here (Plate 1.34), Krishna is depicted in playful conversation with his principal spouse Rukmini, and the entire page is taken up by just a single couple's interaction. After seeing this page, the impression of uncountable snapshots on the previous page is underlined, due to the marked difference in the artist's use of the available space. The crowded and stacked arrangement of the earlier page creates a sense of seriality and repetition, while the second page suggests an exclusive encounter.

A last example will reinforce my point that the Kanoria artist formulated his illustrations with particular care, keeping the narrative in mind while arranging the page. Chapter 68 describes the strength of Balarama who manages to drag a city off its foundation with his powerful plough. One of Krishna's sons Samba goes to the Kaurava capital Hastinapura and carries away Duryodhana's daughter, in the same manner that his father stole away many brides. This angers the Kauravas greatly and a group of them pursue the lone Samba, capturing him and taking him prisoner. Hearing the news Krishna is livid, but Balarama tries to calm him down and act as mediator with the Kauravas. He heads to Hastinapura with a group of sages and stops outside the city in a garden, sending a messenger to court. The Kauravas are pleased to hear about Balarama's arrival and they come to the garden to welcome him, only to take great umbrage at his admonishment of their unlawful capture of Samba. Filled with pride they insult Balarama grievously before returning to their city. Balarama, much quicker to anger than Krishna, is furious and decides to teach the arrogant Kauravas a lesson. He lifts his plough and

resolves to drag Hastinapura into the Ganga, thereby destroying all its inhabitants. Of course the Kauravas are completely traumatized and rush to beg Balarama's forgiveness.

The artist makes imaginative use of page divisions in Plate 1.35 in order to convey the story. The upper register is the garden, showing Balarama's arrival on a chariot on the left, him meeting the Kauravas at the center, and him in anger on the right holding up his plough. The bottom left compartment has Balarama standing on a small platform with the Ganga in front of him. In his hands he carries an enormous plough that stretches across the compartments on the page to the extreme right, signaling its great reach. The plough is embedded behind a figure, possibly the king of the Kauravas, whose capital is being uprooted. The gestures of his courtiers standing around him convey their agitation. The next moment in the story finds the Kauravas with hands folded in front of Balarama as he is dragging the city and then returning to Hastinapura in the bottom right.⁶² By the simple trick of painting Balarama's plough across the length of the folio, transcending page divisions, the artist manages to convince viewers of how far Balarama's plough can reach, its great prowess and the immense strength of its wielder.

***Caurapañcāśikā Bhāgavata* as a Source**

The analysis of paintings I have presented thus far should be sufficient to understand the complexity of the artistic process the Kanoria artists were engaged in by conceptualizing very detailed and individualized illustrations for a manuscript of 116 pages. One source they could and possibly did consult was the so-called Dispersed *Bhāgavata* done in the *Caurapañcāśikā* (referred to as CPS) style⁶³ of the mid-sixteenth century.⁶⁴ Scholars have remarked on the

⁶² The artist has employed conflation here.

⁶³ The *Caurapañcāśikā* style is named after an eponymous manuscript which depicts characteristic features of the style. These include flat primary colours, linear, angular yet curvaceous bodies, eyes that extend across the entire profile face and transparent women's scarves.

connection between the two sets in particular and the styles more generally. The “bright color and abstraction” of the Malwa style is something it has in common with the CPS group of manuscripts.⁶⁵ Joan Cummins notices how “both consist entirely of flat shapes. Both feature hot, bright colors, especially red...”⁶⁶ and goes on to ask if and how the two styles might be related. According to Daniel Ehn bom, the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and the Dispersed *Bhāgavata* share compositional formats and iconographical elements as well, apart from bright colors and flatness.⁶⁷ Even though the two manuscripts were produced about a hundred and fifty years apart, and despite the fact that there is no evidence outside the images themselves to support their connection, an examination of the paintings will show that the two manuscripts are undoubtedly linked.

An image from the CPS manuscript (Plate 1.36) depicts the same subject as Plate 1.18 from the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, Krishna’s journey to Indraprastha.⁶⁸ The CPS image is divided into two horizontal registers, which is unlike the Kanoria image’s three vertical panels, but in both cases, Krishna and his retinue make their way from left to right, while the Pandavas emerge from the palace on the right side of the page. The zone in which Krishna is greeted by the various Pandavas is distinguished by its red background in both illustrations and is arranged in two horizontal bands. The text tells us that Krishna touches the feet of the two elder Pandavas, hugs Arjuna who is of the same age as him, and receives the salutations of the younger twins. In the

⁶⁴ According to Daniel Ehn bom, the complete Latter Half was not illustrated because he knows of no extant leaves beyond Chapter 75, *An Analysis and Reconstruction of the Dispersed Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1984, p.56.

⁶⁵ Ehn bom, *Analysis*, p.49.

⁶⁶ Joan Cummins, *Indian Painting: From Cave Temple to the Colonial Period*, Boston: MFA Publications, 2006, p.123.

⁶⁷ Ehn bom, *Analysis*, p.94.

⁶⁸ I believe it is incorrectly identified on the Metropolitan Museum website as ‘Krishna is welcomed into Mathura’.

Kanoria image, in the upper band of the red greeting zone Krishna is shown twice, reaching for the feet of the two Pandavas while in the lower band he is depicted twice, once hugging Arjuna and second blessing the twins. In the CPS image, Krishna is also depicted four times but he does not touch anyone's feet—he greets one brother in the top band and the other four in the lower one. Despite these differences, however, it is undeniable that the two images are connected compositionally.

Another image from the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* where the conceptualization of the page matches the CPS manuscript closely is Plate 1.33 that portrays Krishna partaking of household bliss with his sixteen thousand plus wives simultaneously. The Kanoria image portrays both Krishna's multiple weddings as well as the scenes from his home life on the page which is divided into eighteen compartments, devoting nine each to weddings and domesticity. The CPS page is divided into nine compartments, comparable to the right half of the Kanoria illustration, all of which contain vignettes of Krishna being pampered in myriad ways (Plate 1.37). Many of the compartments in the two images represent similar activities such as Krishna's wife pressing his feet while he rests, another dressing his hair or a third fanning him. Even though the two images are not identical, the narrative strategies utilized in both are alike, suggesting that perhaps the Kanoria artist turned to CPS manuscript for inspiration.

But this should not detract from our admiration of the Kanoria artist's narrative skill as he employs his vivid imagination to make the paintings original and truly his own; nor does he always follow the arrangements of the CPS manuscript. Aniruddha, Krishna's grandson, being made captive by Bana for making love to the latter's virgin daughter Usha is the subject of Chapter 62.⁶⁹ Usha falls in love with Aniruddha in a dream and her companion Chitrlekha transports him into the women's quarters of Bana's palace magically. In Plate 1.38 from the

⁶⁹ This is the cause of the great confrontation between Krishna and Shiva discussed earlier for its battle scenes.

Kanoria set, the left side of the page is meant to be Dwarka where everyone is asleep, and at the top of the page in a blue compartment we see Chitrlekha carrying the sleeping blue-grey skinned Aniruddha in his bed and presenting him to Usha on the right. Bana, recognizable by his multiple arms, hears about the desecration of his daughter and proceeds to Usha's room. There Aniruddha defeats Bana's soldiers but is made captive by Bana's magical serpent coils at the center bottom of the illustration. The CPS image (Plate 1.39) portrays Bana in the top left compartment with his soldiers in the compartment below. Blue-skinned Aniruddha is beating them with a rod but is already bound by Bana's snakes. Usha is depicted alone in a chamber to the right. Apart from the fact that the Kanoria image contains many more episodes, the encounter between Bana and Aniruddha is visualized differently. Where the Kanoria artist represents Bana actively wrapping his magical cords around Aniruddha, the CPS artist presents Aniruddha already tied up. Aniruddha fighting the soldiers and then being subdued, each scene is depicted separately in the Kanoria set, while the CPS artist clubs them together, employing conflation. Though the Kanoria artist might look at the CPS manuscript occasionally, he does not feel compelled to abide by its formulations throughout and even if he does obtain ideas from the earlier set, the paintings are nevertheless conceived in a distinctive and ingenious manner.

Depicting Krishna

Throughout the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, Krishna (and his son and grandson) is recognizable by his exclusive bluish skin color and because he is the protagonist of the story, he usually appears multiple times on the page. There are occasions when one has to search the illustration in order to locate Krishna, who might be tucked away in a corner and not featured prominently. In the chaos of battle in Plate 1.21, Krishna is not immediately visible, despite his distinctive coloring. But in most cases, the artist clearly signals that Krishna is the most crucial person in the

image. In Plate 1.14, for example, even though Krishna is not at the center of the page he is delineated very conspicuously in a separate red compartment in the council hall on the left. The artist generally acknowledges Krishna's central role in the narrative by visually stressing his importance, either through repetition or by distinctive placement.

In most of the images in the manuscript, Krishna is represented as a fearless warrior and great hero, but only rarely are we reminded of his divine nature as an incarnation of Vishnu. The artist rarely presents Krishna with multiple arms or carrying the attributes of Vishnu unless he is specifically prompted by the text. Krishna is depicted with four arms in Plates 1.40 and 1.34 that illustrate Chapters 51 and 60 respectively. The first, discussed in detail in later chapters, tells the story of the destruction of Krishna's enemy Kalayavana by Muchukunda and the latter's adulation of Krishna in the cave where the action unfolds. In this context the Brajbhasha text specifically mentions "*bhuja cāri*," literally "arms four" and in the painting, Krishna has four arms in the moment that he is worshipped by Muchukunda. The other two times he figures on the page he has just two. In Chapter 60 again the text refers to Krishna's "*caturabhuja nūpa*" or "four-armed form" when he bends down to attend to Rukmini who has fainted (due to Krishna's teasing) and the artist follows the words precisely, giving Krishna four arms in the instant when he lifts up his wife and not when he is comfortably seated on a bed in the center of the page. I have previously discussed Chapter 66 which describes Krishna's encounter with Paundraka, who accuses Krishna of being the false Vishnu, and the text specifically mentions the four arms and "all the attributes of the lord." Plates 1.31 and 1.32 that illustrate this story show Krishna with four arms.

In Plate 1.41, when Krishna battles the armies of Narakasura (Chapter 59), he is depicted with four arms. The text does not cite Vishnu particularly, but tells us that Krishna accompanied

by his wife Satyabhama, rides on Garuda (Vishnu's mount) to Narakasura's palace, and describes how he uses the conch, the mace as well as the discus. The references to Garuda and three of Vishnu's attributes have caused the artist to depict Krishna with four arms. In a similar manner, a reference is made in Chapters 88 and 89 not to Vishnu and his four arms, but to Vaikuntha, the divine abode associated with him. For this reason, the artist gives our hero multiple arms in these chapters.

At the end of Chapter 89 the Brajbhasha text presents us with a kind of "verbal icon."⁷⁰ The author indulges in a *nakha-sikha* or "head to toe" description, a poetic device where the beauty of the beloved is catalogued starting from the (hair on the) head and right down to the toes, and the reader is "led to recognize the iconographic form through a process of progressive revelation."⁷¹ By the time we reach the feet, there can be no doubt as to the identity of the person and the enumerated features constitute an "iconographic blueprint"⁷² for Vishnu as encountered by Arjuna through the mediation of Krishna. Starting with the thousand hooded serpent Shesha in whose lap the Supreme Person sits, the text tells us about eight arms, big eyes, gem-studded crown, earrings, yellow robes, forest garland, Kaustubha gem (around the neck), the mark of Shrivatsa on the chest and the discus and other weapons. He is worshipped by Brahma and with Lakshmi at his feet. The author makes his way from the gem-studded crown on the head to Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, at the feet of the figure, presenting a variation on the *nakha-sikha* theme. We are also told about the gods that worship the figure and others who sing his

⁷⁰ Kenneth E. Bryant, *Poems to the Child-God: Structures and Strategies in the Poetry of Sūrdās*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1978, pp.72-112.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.97.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.96.

praises, completing the picture of an idolized deity. This staging clearly conjures up an iconic image of eight-armed Vishnu before our eyes.

The artist, however, understands things in his own way. In Plate 1.42 the eight-armed Vishnu appears to be seated on the many *heads* of Shesha, the serpent in whose coiled *lap* he normally rests peacefully in the middle of the cosmic ocean. Vishnu lying on the coils of Shesha accompanied by his consort is a very conventional picture and the fact that the artist's depiction is at variance is striking. Is it possible that he was unaware of this very typical visualization of Vishnu? This also raises the question about the role of a middle man who may have been guiding the painter through the narrative—how familiar was he with Vaishnava imagery? The First Half of the Tenth Book contains an episode where Krishna vanquishes the multi-hooded serpent Kaliya who had been poisoning the waters of the Yamuna and the denouement is imagined with Krishna poised on the many hoods of the snake. Plate 1.43 from the Dispersed First Half, whose illustrations bear a very close likeness to those from the National Museum First Half, contains this exact scene. The base of the page is the river and in the bottom right corner, Krishna seems to squat on the black serpent's head, merrily playing his flute. He is propitiated by *nāginīs* (female serpents) in the water and by the gods from the sky, while along the riverbank, cows and humans are astonished. The form of Kaliya here closely resembles that of Shesha in Plate 1.42, right down to the loop in the lower part of its body. Is the Kanoria artist referring to this image as he draws Vishnu and Shesha?⁷³ Was the intended viewer of the manuscript a Vaishnava and if yes, how would he have reacted to such a portrayal, given that Kaliya is a foe while Shesha is a friend?

⁷³ Interestingly enough, a copy of Plate 1.42, probably from the Dispersed Seitz Latter Half, is labeled as the Kaliya episode in Bonhams auction 16776, April 2nd 2009, Lot 123.

In contrast, a verbal icon in the text behind an image from the National Museum First Half is pictorialized to evoke the feeling of *darśana* of a Pushtimarg deity. Plate 1.44 depicts the night when Krishna is born in a dungeon in Mathura and the good omens that are visible all around. Following the text, Krishna has assumed his divine form with four arms and Vishnu's attributes and is seated at the center of a room flanked by his mother and father. The placement of two parental devotee figures on either side and the particularized positioning of their feet with the back foot slightly forward, together with canopy hanging from the ceiling and the array of objects placed in front, recall the way Shrinathji is delineated in the Pushtimarg context.⁷⁴ Was the artist encouraged to insert this iconic portrayal into an otherwise overtly narrative cycle of illustrations? Or is it the case that the artist who worked on this image was accustomed to drawing Pushtimargi icons and rendered Krishna in the same manner?

Text and Image

The illustrations I have discussed in this chapter give us an idea of the strategies employed by the artist in visualizing the text inscribed on the reverse of the pictures. This text, analyzed in detail in the next chapter, is an action-oriented narrative that eschews philosophical and descriptive passages which do not carry the story forward and is quite ideally suited for illustration. The artists executing the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* stay faithful to the account of events described in the Brajbhasha text written on the manuscript, rather than the Sanskrit or any other vernacular re-telling, suggesting that someone intimately familiar with the Mahananda Latter Half was instructing the artists about what to paint. For example, Chapter 56 of the Latter Half tells the story of the Syamantaka gem that is stolen and through a chain of events ends up in the

⁷⁴ Shrinathji is standing in such depictions. Another deity of the Pushtimarg, Mathureshji, is depicted with the four attributes of Vishnu, like in this visualization. Only the hands in which they appear are different. See Woodman Taylor, *Visual Culture in Performative Practice: The Aesthetics, Politics and Poetics of Visuality in Liturgical Practices of the Vallabha Sampradāya Hindu Community at Kota*, PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1997, p.29.

possession of the bear Jambavan who keeps it in his cave. In order to recover the gem, Krishna makes his way to the cave and is forced to fight the bear. Mahananda's Brajbhasha text tells us that Jambavan attacks Krishna with a tree while the Sanskrit text does not inform us about Jambavan's specific weapon. In Plate 1.45 that represents these events, in the lower left corner, we will note that the bear-like Jambavan does come at Krishna with a tree as mentioned in the Brajbhasha text inscribed on the reverse.

In an earlier section I have discussed the defeat of Shalva by Krishna and his Yadava forces. The Sanskrit version of the encounter includes an episode that portrays Krishna's human frailty when he is momentarily deluded by Shalva's magical powers. Shalva pretends to capture and kill Krishna's father and it takes Krishna a few moments to realize that it is all an illusion wrought to weaken him and that his father is actually safe and sound. The Brajbhasha text steers clear of this episode, omitting it entirely and the illustration does not depict Krishna's delusion either. Plate 1.25 is all about the battle and the ultimate beheading of Shalva, closely following the story as it is inscribed on the reverse. Even when the Brajbhasha text contains long lists of pilgrimage sites or divine weaponry used by Krishna and Shiva, the artist's endeavor is to show them just as they are described in the text. It seems that for the most part the Kanoria artist takes his cue from the text he is illustrating.

The artist does, however, include scenes in the image that are not found in the text that serve to complete the picture. These never interfere with the main narrative and may be regarded as space-fillers, part of the backdrop or scenery that helps set the stage for the main action. The persons in these vignettes are the extras of a movie or the chorus in a musical that do not have an independent role but nevertheless serve a purpose in the finished product. From the numerous other warriors engaged in a battle to the unspecified occupants of a palace in Dwarka, none are

pointedly mentioned in the Brajbhasha text. But the artist uses his own judgment and includes them anyway, regarding them as necessary not to the plot of the story, but in accomplishing his pictorial goals. It is often these supporting actors that are adopted almost unchanged between manuscripts.

Images from the National Museum First Half, however, contain narrative elements external to the text inscribed on them, probably because the artist did not only consult the text inscribed on the manuscript but other sources and re-tellings as well. The third chapter of the First Half of the Tenth Book describes how Krishna's father transports him from the dungeon in Mathura to the midst of a cowherding community in Gokula to save him from the wrath of his maternal uncle Kamsa. The text mentions a stormy night and the rising Yamuna which must be traversed. Plate 1.46 presents palaces on either side of the page with Vasudeva⁷⁵ traveling across the turbulent river in between. The snake acts as an umbrella for the newborn in the basket on Vasudeva's head. During the crossing, however, they are attacked by a lion.⁷⁶ This lion is not present in the traditional Sanskrit text or in the Brajbhasha text inscribed on the reverse of the page, but appears in Lalach Kavi's mid sixteenth-century *Haricarita*, a re-telling in Brajbhasha of the First Half.⁷⁷ The motif of the lion attacking Vasudeva on his journey is also found in the image from the National Museum First Half [monoscenic] (Plate 1.47) suggesting that it acquired a life of its own independent of the text.⁷⁸ One artist may have heard/read this version

⁷⁵ Vasudeva is Krishna's biological father while Nanda is his foster father.

⁷⁶ The animal can be painted as a lion or a tiger.

⁷⁷ Grahame R. Niemann, *A Critical Edition of the Bhāgavat Daśam Skandh of Bhūpati*, PhD dissertation, St. John's College, University of Cambridge, 1981, p.30.

⁷⁸ I would like to draw attention to the depiction of Krishna with his parents on the right side of the page in Plate 1.47 as it is very similar to Pushtimargi icon-like arrangement of Plate 1.44. A clear connection between the two can be seen.

of events and included a lion, and other artists followed suit, making the lion an integral part of the scene even when the actual text inscribed on the painting does not mention it. In this way, a picture might tell a different story than its text, becoming an independent re-telling of sorts itself.

What does this tell us? That artists did not always restrict themselves to illustrating the texts that were inscribed on the images and referred to additional sources including other illustrations and different re-tellings of the story. We cannot be certain which of these motivated the artist of the National Museum First Half—did he read/hear Lalach or see an earlier painting of the episode—but definitely a separate source was consulted. The artist of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, in contrast, never visits a source outside the text written on its leaves for the narrative.⁷⁹ Is this because he wishes to remain faithful to the re-telling found in the text? Or is it due to the fact that there were no other sources that he could refer to regarding the Latter Half of the Tenth Book? The late seventeenth century is the first time that some attention is paid to the Latter Half and there were no vernacular re-tellings of it available earlier. In general it was and still is much less prevalent than the extremely popular First Half. Is it possible that the artist of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* confines himself to Mahananda's text because he had hardly any other choices, unlike an artist who was engaged with the First Half that was already available from multiple earlier re-tellings?

Conclusion

I return to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter about whether artists were illustrating stories or texts and stress the importance of examining it with respect to creations that join together text and image. Identifying the sources an artist consults, both for the content as well as the appearance of what he paints, is a necessary first step to understanding the process of artistic production. The informants to which an artist turns tell us about the socio-cultural milieu

⁷⁹ He does seem to consult the CPS manuscript but for page composition.

he inhabited whose stories, performances and artworks he was familiar and conversant with. The fact that the artist of the National Museum First Half paints a detail (the lion) that is not mentioned in the text is informative about the literary productions he was acquainted with and/or the other illustrated First Half manuscripts he had seen. The obvious formal connection between the Kanoria and the CPS manuscripts forces us to consider how an artist working in the 1680s, had access to the sixteenth century set. Is it a case of drawings being passed down through generations of artists or a patron who was already in possession of the CPS set commissioning the Kanoria manuscript and providing the workshop with the earlier one as a model?

My goal in this chapter has been to explore the narrative strategies of the artist(s) of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* in the manner of scholars like Dehejia⁸⁰ and to move away from the tendency of simply describing an image. The content of the Kanoria artist's illustrations is drawn from the Mahananda Latter Half which he translates into lively and exciting images, each one with a different page composition and arrangement from the previous. And even though he might repeat the register-format for battle scenes or divide the page into compartments for domestic ones in order to help the viewer instantly recognize the subject matter, we never get the impression that the artist is resorting to stock scenes. Despite the registers, each battle is individually conceived according to the particulars found in the text and a knowing viewer would never mistake one for another.

The detailed correspondence between text and image must be kept in mind when we consider the process by which the paintings were executed. Only a handful of illustrations in the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* are monoscenic, while most are extremely complex and made up of multiple episodes. Krishna is repeated many times on a page and the narrative often follows a zigzag trajectory across it. The artist would have to receive very precise instructions about what to draw

⁸⁰ Dehejia, 'Treatment of Narrative' and 'On Modes of Visual Narration.'

or be able to read the story for himself. What is revealing is how the artist is unfamiliar with a very conventional visual depiction of Vishnu lying on Shesha's coils with Lakshmi pressing his feet (or chooses to portray it differently). Perhaps this is why the artist stays within the boundaries of the Brajbhasha text he is given, because he does not know Krishna's story, in the same way that he does not know that Vishnu does not sit on the multiple heads of Shesha, and the Mahananda Latter Half is the only source that feeds his imagination. Moreover, it is very possible that Krishna's life in Mathura-Dwarka as a warrior and politician was just not as popular as his childhood and youthful antics.

Maintaining agreement between text and image is much simpler when one serves as the basis for the other, because, as we shall see in my chapter on copying, the two do not match up as precisely in copies made after the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*. But how essential is it that they do? Are there situations in which an incongruity between the textual and pictorial narrative would not reduce the worth of the manuscript? Are there times when a manuscript performs a function other than a story-telling one, or when this role is secondary? Can the aesthetic or religious value of a manuscript, for example, trump its purpose as a chronicle of the life of Krishna? And if an image does not convey the events that are inscribed on it, can it still be called an illustration of the text?

2: AN ACTION-ORIENTED BRAJBHASHA LATTER HALF

Introduction

In the previous chapter I have stressed the close correspondence between text and image in the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*. While the artists of First Half manuscripts had sources external to the manuscript they turned to for the story, the Kanoria artist confines himself to the Brajbhasha text, the Mahananda Latter Half, inscribed on the reverse of the illustrations. This could be an active choice that the artist makes, but one must ask whether the relative popularity of the two Halves is also a factor. It is the First Half that has provided devotees, poets, saints and story-tellers much of their source material from medieval times. Vernacular translations, illustrated depictions and literature based on specific episodes proliferated across the Subcontinent and form the basis of a large volume of scholarly investigation. In contrast, apart from a few episodes such as that of Krishna's childhood friend Sudama or his wife Rukmini, the Latter Half has never enjoyed even half as much popularity¹ and has only rarely been investigated. The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, however, witness a change. There was a proliferation in the production and dissemination of non-Sanskrit *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* manuscripts throughout North India during this period,² and this includes, for the first time, Brajbhasha translations of the complete Tenth Book, First and Latter Halves, many of which were illustrated and /or copied. Some attention was now being lavished on the Latter Half as well.

In a later chapter, I probe the significance of this historical moment alongside the reasons for an interest in Krishna as the warrior and politician. This chapter focuses on the Mahananda Latter Half text inscribed behind the illustrations of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*. I first introduce the

¹ This is most true of the Brajbhasha tradition which I study.

² Based on discussions with Monika Boehm-Tettelbach (Heidelberg University), Stefano Pello (Ca'Foscari University of Venice) and Tyler Williams (Columbia University).

Bhāgavata Purāṇa in its Sanskrit incarnation and show how it self-consciously draws attention to the method of oral performance by which it was largely transmitted through the use of a dialogue framework and devices such as prolepses. It is a work that has been “translated” infinitely with authors adapting and transforming it according to their own requirements. The Tenth Book, being the most popular part of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, has undergone many changes as it has made its way through history and by briefly comparing the Mahananda Latter Half to another contemporary Brajbhasha Latter Half, I show how two re-tellings composed just one year apart can be quite different from each other.

I would, here, like to briefly clarify some terminology: “translation” is the term used to indicate the process and product of moving from one language to another and is usually employed when speaking of vernacular “versions” of Sanskrit “originals”. It implies converting a text from a source language into a target language and a search for equivalence between two distinct idioms or systems of communication. A. K. Ramanujan discusses three categories of translation³ based on faithfulness to the original: the first is iconic translation where the product of translation resembles the original as closely as possible in both content as well as structure. The second category is indexical translation where local references are incorporated in order for the text to make sense in its target context. The third category of symbolic translation refers to instances where the new text can say something completely different from the original and maintains only a nominal connection to it. I assume that the very act of moving between two languages ensures that no translation can be perfectly iconic and sometimes it is the intention of the translator to suggest a different meaning than the original.

³ A. K. Ramanujan ‘Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇas*: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation’ in Paula Richman, ed., *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991, pp.44-45.

A second classification system has been devised by Tony K. Stewart in thinking about the precolonial linguistic encounter in Bengal and the quest for comparable terminology in the Bengali language for Islamic ideas and concepts.⁴ The first type is formal literary equivalence, an idea similar to iconic translation, which implies perfect one-to-one correspondence between the source and receiving languages. The second is refraction and mirroring which involves a search for approximations accompanied by some distortions in meaning. Dynamic equivalence is the third class that “also gives priority to cultural context, which can begin to account for the different values ascribed to equivalent terms. The emphasis shifts away from the precise content and contours of the idea being translated, toward that idea as it is used in its social context, its role and function within the target language and culture, which then allows for a kind of creative latitude in seeking equivalence.”⁵ The fourth is the category of the intersemiotic, the most complex form where one conceptual world is understood in terms of the other and translation is no longer confined to the linguistic and moves into the realm of other cultural expressions as well.

Ramanujan and Stewart have devised two systems that are somewhat complementary in thinking about linguistic translation in the Indian context. The assumption in both cases, however, is the presence of a source language and a target language, and a text that is translated from one into the other. The situation is much more complicated when we think about the Tenth Book, precisely because in most cases we cannot appoint one single source text. Authors who composed vernacular Tenth Books did not necessarily refer to a specific work in a particular language as the starting point. While some authors undoubtedly consulted Sanskrit texts, others,

⁴ Tony K. Stewart, ‘In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory’, *History of Religions* 40, No.3 (Winter 2001), pp.261-88.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.280.

as discussed in the introduction, based their compositions on stories that were circulating in society and were known from many sources and multiple informants. Hence what any vernacular author was engaged in was a process of re-telling a story that was part of the cultural fabric of the world he inhabited. Rather than characterizing the many non-Sanskrit Tenth Books as translations, thinking in terms of tellings and re-tellings will be more productive in understanding the trajectories of their transmission. This chapter is engaged in the investigation of one such re-telling.

There are, however, difficulties that arise for scholars in the absence of an “original” work. How does one do textual comparison? While it is undeniable that many early-modern vernacular re-tellings of the epics and *Purāṇas* evince an awareness of the Sanskrit tradition, they do not necessarily position themselves in relation to it. Hence, examining them as relative to the Sanskrit might not always be as productive as, for example, studying them alongside other contemporary vernacular works. But this does not imply that there is nothing to be gained by a Sanskrit-vernacular comparison. Some vernacular texts, like the Mahananda Latter Half, demonstrate an obvious connection with Sanskrit ones, and even when they don’t, as long as we are aware that there are other forces at work and do not therefore consider vernacular works to be inferior or incorrect, we are on safe ground.

This approach is in tandem with “the now accepted notion” among translation theorists like Lawrence Venuti “that translation is an active production of a text which resembles, but nonetheless transforms, the original.”⁶ Even though they are concerned with the more narrowly defined genre of linguistic translation, there are similar issues at stake such as the desire to recognize the translator’s agency and to perceive a translation as a creative work in its own right.

⁶ Lawrence Venuti, ‘The Translator’s Invisibility’, *Criticism*, Vol.28, no.2 (Spring 1986), pp.179-212, p.181.

We might think along the lines that the legend of Rama is available to us in the form of multiple re-tellings including the Sanskrit text attributed to Valmiki, Tulsidas' vernacular *Rāmacaritamānas*, modern day comic books, serialized television shows, artworks and performances. Each re-telling⁷ responds to its own surroundings and adopts a distinctive point of view, but they all narrate Rama's story with many familiar recognizable elements. Similarly the story of Krishna also comes to us from several re-tellings, the most prolific being those that "cluster around" the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

I will study the Mahananda Latter Half in relation to the Sanskrit in order to understand the nature of this particular re-telling. The aspect I am particularly interested in exploring is how the text lends itself to illustration and whether it was conceived specifically for such a role. Is there anything in the text to indicate that the author was conscious that his work was to be pictorialized? Does the text assist the artist in conceiving a cycle of illustrations? What are the clues available for the artist to draw on? These questions will be addressed during the course of this chapter while referring back to the last one where the relationship between text and image in the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* has been examined at length.

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

At this juncture I am faced with a problem that I have alluded to in the previous section: while I would like to provide an introduction to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, I am wary of referring to one particular re-telling and crowning it as the original. Unfortunately my knowledge of *Bhāgavata Purāṇas* is not so deep that I can provide a wide-ranging overview that takes various representative re-tellings into consideration and I am compelled to make a choice. Given that the text I am working on demonstrates links to the Sanskrit one, I will refer to the Sanskrit text not as

⁷ See Richman, *Many Rāmāyaṇas* for a discussion of re-tellings of the story of Rama.

the original, but as the traditional *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*,⁸ keeping in mind that the Sanskrit way is only one of many. Even if we are not in possession of the original Sanskrit text, we can assume that the Sanskrit tradition is older than the early-modern vernacular one, justifying my choice to an extent.⁹

The aspect I am keen to focus on is how the traditional *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, by constantly drawing attention to its many centuries of oral transmission, gives tacit permission to later authors to re-tell the story in their own words and for their individual purposes. I mentioned in the previous chapter that the work consists of twelve books and opens with sages in a forest requesting a *sūta* to tell them about Vishnu. Who is this *sūta* figure lauded by the *brāhmaṇas* and considered worthy of telling them about the great god? He is the king's charioteer who acts as a messenger, bard and chronicler in times of peace.¹⁰ And though he is not a *brāhmaṇa* himself, he is always treated with respect due to this vast knowledge of *smṛti* literature. In fact in Chapter 78 of the Latter Half, when Balarama kills a *sūta* for what he perceives to be a grave insult—occupying a seat higher than the *brāhmaṇas*—he is told he must atone for this horrific sin. That is why he undertakes the pilgrimage depicted in Plates 1.27 and 1.28. The *sūta*'s acquiescence to the sages' entreaty constitutes the bulk of the material of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, establishing its narrative framework as a dialogue between the *sūta* and the *brāhmaṇas*.

It is important to think of the *sūta* as the narrator and not the author. In fact, the *sūta* is not even the primary narrator of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. In the second chapter of the First Book we hear the voice of Vyasa, the supra narrator who relates the dialogue discussed above. Also,

⁸ I am using C. L. Goswami, *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, Part II, Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 2006 which has the Sanskrit text alongside its English translation.

⁹ For a discussion of the debates regarding the date of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* see Ludo Rocher, *The Purāṇas*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986. The latest possible date suggested by scholars is 1300 CE.

¹⁰ See *Ibid.*, pp.53-9 for a detailed discussion.

within the *sūta*'s account we come across more levels of dialogue and incorporated narrative voices, with the *sūta* telling the sages about some other narrator who conveyed the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to another listener and so on. The most "quoted" of these is Shukadeva who picks up the thread from the Second Book at the behest of King Parikshit. The latter is cursed to die and chooses to hear about Vishnu in the last week of his life. Hence the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is set up as a series of dialogues within dialogues with the implication that narrators are engaged in the re-telling of a work that existed previously. Giorgio Bonazzoli presents a discussion of more than one *Purāṇa* where the narrator is asked specifically to re-narrate, or the audience wishes to hear a tale once again, evincing a Puranic awareness of repetition.¹¹ The *Purāṇas* themselves acknowledge that they are repetitions, and also re-tellings. We should understand the distinction I am making between re-telling and repetition: while repetition is the occurrence of an act again at a different time and/or place, re-telling involves some transformation of the narrative as discussed earlier in this chapter. Moreover the very act of re-telling itself has occurred earlier and the re-tellings are arranged in a sort of reverse history with the supra narrator being the most recent and the innermost dialogue, which does not refer to any others, being the earliest. Vyasa's account contains all the other levels of dialogue, indicating that they have already taken place by the time it is his turn.¹²

Of interest is how the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* draws attention to the oral nature of its own transfer by constructing these various dialogues, implying a singular exposition each time based on the specific queries and responses of the participants. It lends itself very easily to translation,

¹¹ Giorgio Bonazzoli, 'Remarks on the Nature of the Purāṇa-s', *Purāṇa* Vol.XXV, No.1 (January, 1983), pp.77-113.

¹² Philip Lutgendorf discusses how in the *Rāmācaritamānasa*, Tulsidas sets up a four level "narrative genealogy" where Shiva is the "primal narrator" who relates Rama's story to Parvati, and Tulsidas is the latest. All narrators remain "actively present throughout" and one of them is always speaking at any given time. We can gauge the identity of the narrator through that of the listener. See his *The Life of a Text: Performing the 'Ramcaritmanas' of Tulsidas*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991p.24.

re-interpretation and re-telling with the implication that every future author is another narrator. It is not straightforward reportage but a conversation between individuals who ask questions, produce back stories and make connections across vast expanses of time and space. The course of events is not always chronological,¹³ a common occurrence when we are trying to recall and share an exciting story. Episodes that seem to occur one after another in time are separated by the space of many books, and flashbacks and prolepses give us glimpses into the past and future. In the Third Book we are told about the demonic twin brothers Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu who became scourges on the face of the earth. The death of Hiranyaksha at the hands of Vishnu in his Varaha or boar incarnation is narrated in Chapter 19 of the Third Book. However, the description of Hiranyakashipu's grief at the death of his brother and his destruction by Vishnu in the half man-half lion incarnation is saved till the Seventh Book.

Prolepsis or a flash forward in storytelling is again a device connected with the work's performative aspect: the entire *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was not always recited or performed in one sitting, and I believe a trailer of what is yet to come in the form of a prolepsis was a way of piquing audience interest and ensuring that they returned for the next session. Performers could not build up suspense in the sense of whodunit because the audience was primarily made up of knowing listeners who were familiar with the plot and knew what would happen next, including who would be defeated and which side would emerge victorious. But a flash forward could serve as a reminder of what lies ahead. For example, in Chapter 37 of the Tenth Book, the celestial sage Narada approaches Krishna, and, singing his praises, presents a catalogue of everything

¹³ Jocelyn Penny Small makes the point that by the second half of the 5th century BCE, the Greeks began to distinguish between deeds from the legend of Hercules, some of which must occur in a particular order while others just needed to occur, their precise order being less important. The latter type was those that shed light on Hercules' character and personality. He must kill the Nemean lion first to be equipped for the later deeds and his apotheosis will always be last, but in between there is scope for a lot of flexibility. See her 'Time in Space: Narrative in Classical Art', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (Dec., 1999), pp. 562-575, p.563.

Krishna will accomplish in the future, or in the upcoming chapters of the Tenth Book. This is the scene represented in the top left corner of Plate 1.12 with a label that informs us of the same.

Parikshit's question to Shukadeva at the beginning of the Tenth Book similarly contains an element of prolepsis as we are told about some of the things Krishna will do over the course of the work. While these flash forwards remind readers of Krishna's greatness, it is also a preview of what they can expect as the story unfolds.¹⁴ It is possible that such prolepses are a remnant from the oral tradition that have been incorporated into the textual one, or a conscious reminder of it.

The Brajbhasha Tradition

In the previous chapter I mentioned that re-tellings of the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are prolific and there is an enormous body of secondary literature based on it as well.¹⁵ Because Krishna spends a large part of his life in the Braj region comprising Gokula, Vrindavan and Mathura, devotees believe that he spoke Brajbhasha, "the language of Braj." This, coupled with the language's popular appeal as compared to Sanskrit, made it the ideal vehicle to carry the story of Krishna in its many different forms. This includes devotional songs from at least the sixteenth century onwards. Surdas was drawing on themes from the Tenth Book,¹⁶ songs attributed to Mirabai (in vernacular but not always Brajbhasha) emphasize service to god above duty to family and adherence to social norms,¹⁷ and Hit Harivamsh's verses deify Radha,¹⁸ a

¹⁴ Even though Krishna is the actual recipient of Narada's speech, I believe the listener/reader/viewer is the intended audience.

¹⁵ For example, the commentarial tradition that grew up around the Tenth Book which includes the *Subodhini* by the founder of the Pushtimarg, Vallabhacharya.

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion see R. S. McGregor, *Hindi Literature from its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1984, pp.76-80.

¹⁷ John S. Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in Their Times and Ours*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005, p.29.

figure not mentioned in the Tenth Book but popularized by Jayadeva's twelfth-century work the *Gīta Govinda* that describes the different situations in the path of love of Krishna and his favorite *gopī* Radha. These poets, alongside many others who may or may not refer to the Tenth Book, gave rise to a new genre of Indian literature, the *pada*. Creations based on specific chapters of the Tenth Book are also in evidence from the sixteenth century.¹⁹ Among the most popular are Chapters 29-33 that describe the *rāsa līlā* or the moonlit dance where Krishna satisfies each and every *gopī* and the account of Krishna's interactions with his childhood friend Sudama from Chapters 80-81. Around the same time we also see the production of vernacular texts that are engaged in a re-telling of the Tenth Book and "it is beyond doubt that by the second half of the sixteenth century, Vaishnava impulses were...giving voice and shape to an exciting new vernacular literary tradition."²⁰

One of the earliest known vernacular First Halves, the *Haricarita*, was written in ca.1530 by Lalach.²¹ It is in Awadhi, a language used further east of Braj, and covers almost the entire subject matter of the First Half up to Chapter 45.²² The last four chapters were completed in the seventeenth century by Asanand. Some thirty or forty years later, Nandadas probably intended to write a complete Brajbhasha Tenth Book, but the volume stops at Chapter 30.²³ We are then faced by what I imagine is a gap in our knowledge, because the next Brajbhasha Tenth Book

¹⁸ McGregor, pp.88-90.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp.97-101.

²⁰ Allison Busch, *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p.27.

²¹ McGregor, p.96.

²² It is this work that contains a reference to a lion that attacks Vasudeva as he makes his way across the Yamuna.

²³ McGregor, pp.96-97.

appears approximately a hundred years later in 1687, written by Bhupati.²⁴ The work is believed to be the first complete vernacular Tenth Book ever.²⁵ It was transmitted in the Perso-Arabic *nastā'liq* script for much of its history and Bhupati was believed to be part of Aurangzeb's train.²⁶

This brings us to 1688, the date found in the colophon of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and therefore presumably by when the Mahananda Latter Half was definitely completed. Judging from extant illustrated manuscripts, it is likely that a complete First Half was also composed, making this a second complete vernacular Tenth Book in as many years. I should point out that existing scholarship on vernacular Tenth Books is sparse but it seems that the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries are the first time that complete re-tellings of it are created for different social groups—apart from Bhupati and Mahananda, the Niranjanis were also producing them²⁷ and we also find that Persian re-tellings of the Tenth Book were composed.²⁸ This is approximately the moment when the *Bhāgavata Māhātmya* was produced,²⁹ and vernacular re-tellings of the whole *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* including all twelve books were being written (by

²⁴ Grahame R. Niemann, *A Critical Edition of the Bhāgavat Daśam Skandh of Bhūpati*, PhD dissertation, St. John's College, University of Cambridge, 1981.

²⁵ Though only the First Half has been researched.

²⁶ Niemann, p.6.

²⁷ Mentioned to me by Tyler Williams (Columbia University). The Niranjanis are a group that worship a formless god whom they believe is perfect in every way. They originated in Rajasthan in the late fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries.

²⁸ Stefano Pello (Ca'Foscari University of Venice) is working on them.

²⁹ John S. Hawley, 'The Transit of Bhakti' (forthcoming).

Brajdasi and Rasjani for example).³⁰ The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries constitute a transformative moment in the life of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and a very significant one for the Tenth Book in particular.

Brajbhasha Authors and Narrators

In order to determine the names of the authors of much of the literature associated with Krishna discussed above, one does not need to look far beyond the works themselves. “Hindi poets frequently signal their authorship by inserting their name, or some variant of it, into their verses.”³¹ Some authors make imaginative use of signatures or *chāpas* that become recurring refrains in their poetry. For example, the poems associated with Mirabai will often have “*Mīrā ke prabhu giridhara nāgara*” or “Mira’s lord (is) the clever mountain-lifter” as the first part of the last line. Authors like Bhupati in his Tenth Book, and Brajdasi in her *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, are more prosaic and use phrases such as “authored by” alongside their names. Both employ formulaic endings for every chapter where they state that it is the *Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, Tenth Book written by them with only a slight difference in the further information each provides: Brajdasi mentions *bhāṣā* (vernacular, usually implying Brajbhasha) and the chapter number while Bhupati indicates the title of the chapter he has just recounted.

An author might also introduce himself to the reader in the first few lines of a work. After meditating on Vishnu and providing a list of his ten incarnations, Bhupati invokes Ganesha and Saraswati through whose grace he sings the glories of the lord.³² He positions himself in the line

³⁰ According to Monika Boehm-Tettelbach in ‘Caturdās’s *Bhāṣā* Version of the Eleventh Book of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*’, at least two complete vernacular re-tellings are available: one by a queen of the Rajput kingdom Kishangarh, who used the pen name Brajdasi, and a second by Vaisnavdas Rasjani, a member of the Gaudiya sect. Both are dated to around 1750.

³¹ Busch, p.58. Hindi here includes Brajbhasha.

³² Niemann, p.227.

of Vyasa and Shukadeva who had narrated the Tenth Book previously. Bhupati will himself relate the narrative in Brajbhasha. He proclaims the greatness of his guru Meghashyam and then turns to the names of his forefathers. He also mentions that he is a *kāyastha* (a caste who were traditionally scribes) of Unnao. In these opening lines Bhupati also expresses doubts as to his creation's poetic worth. Writing in Brajbhasha in the first part of the seventeenth century, Keshavdas adopts a similar attitude and refers to himself as "slow-witted." Allison Busch explains:

The poet's posture of literary infirmity, one much resorted to by vernacular writers, highlights the anxiety that attended early vernacular literacy. Central to Keshavdas's couplet...is an awareness that abandoning Sanskrit in favor of Brajbhasha was a monumental step...the poet evidently felt the imposing grandeur of the Sanskrit past towering over him.³³

The Mahananda Latter Half finished one year after Bhupati's work does not adopt such a stance at all.

The opening couplet of the text of the Mahananda Latter Half and the last sentence of some of the chapters until Chapter 76 suggest that the name of the author of the greater portion of the text is Mahananda.³⁴ Frequently the author seems to be cleverly punning on *mahānanda*³⁵ which is a compound meaning "great joy" (*mahā + ānanda*), but is probably also the author's name.

Remembering/describing the qualities of Srinathji and meditating intensely in the
heart,
To write (or in writing) a vernacular form of the Latter Half Mahananda came (or

³³ Busch, p.24.

³⁴ "Mahananda" does not appear at the end of every chapter.

³⁵ Allison Busch discusses a similar manipulation of the word *praviṇa* by Keshavdas in his *Kavipriyā* (1601) to mean the proper name Pravin Ray, a "rival lute" (*para + bīnā*) and "skilled", pp.39-40. The poet's name itself, "Keshav" can mean both the poet as well as Krishna, but it could also refer to a leading administrator of the time whose name was also Keshavdas. Busch, p.58.

was experienced).³⁶

*Adhipa gunani śrīnāthjī hiyeṃ dhyāna ati lāi,
Uttarārdha bhāṣā karata nūpa mahānanda āi.*

After a brief salutation to Krishna in his form that was worshipped by the Pushtimarg sect, Shrinathji, the author implies that Mahananda is the cause of the vernacular form of the Latter Half of the Tenth Book, and simultaneously *mahānanda* or great joy is the effect derived from the creation of the text.³⁷ Hence *mahānanda* can be the cause (the author), the effect (great joy), or more likely, both. What this inauguration also signals is that the re-telling of the Latter Half is conceived as a separate, independent work and not just a continuation of the First Half in which case a fresh introduction would not be needed. The text of the Sanskrit Latter Half does not contain such a beginning and neither does Bhupati's Brajbhasha one. In both, the narrative continues without a break, the change to the Latter Half indicated only in the formulaic chapter endings, but Mahananda clearly indicates that his Latter Half is a stand-alone literary creation.

At the end of Chapter 58, there is a play on words similar to the opening couplet:

Performed the marriage (according to) customs in Dwarka, Mahananda Krishna,³⁸
The Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata*, this is the fifty eighth chapter.

*Kari vivāha vidhi dvārikā mahānanda hari rāi,
Daśama kathā śrī bhāgavata yaha aṃṭhāvana dhyāi.*

³⁶ The translations in this section might seem a bit clumsy as I have tried to maintain the same sequence of words as the original in order to impart a clearer picture of the author's punning. All translations in this chapter are my own unless otherwise stated.

³⁷ I discussed earlier that the Kanoria manuscript has a purported pair, a 1686 First Half. This manuscript is inscribed with a complete Brajbhasha text of the First Half. While we are not certain which First Half manuscript is the actual 1686 one, the text inscribed on all of them is the same and is the first part of Mahananda's Brajbhasha Latter Half. I examine this issue in a later section of this chapter. If we study the first two lines of the First Half text, we will find it opens with a salutation to Shrinathji as well where the author offers obeisance to the deity. Unlike the Latter Half, however, the name of the author is not woven into the opening, even though "Mahananda" does appear in the closing lines of some of the chapters. Hence, while the Pushtimarg affiliation of both Halves is apparent, the name of the author is not as clearly indicated.

³⁸ "Hari" is another name for Krishna throughout this text.

The first part can be read “Krishna performed the marriage according to customs in Dwarka with great joy,” “Mahananda’s Krishna performed the marriage according to customs in Dwarka” or “Krishna, who is (the cause of) great joy, performed the marriage according to customs in Dwarka.” Again in the concluding lines of Chapter 54:

Tenth (Book) discourse of the *Bhāgavata*, Mahananda sings about the virtues,
Rukmini’s abduction and marriage customs, this is the fifty fourth chapter.

*Daśama kathā śrī bhāgavata mahānanda guna gāi,
Rukmini harana vivāha vidhi yahai cauvanem dhyāi.*

Here Mahananda can be the singer of virtues (or good qualities), or the virtues are sung with great joy. There is a delightful ambiguity in the author’s arrangement of words in these sentences, leaving them open to more than one reading.

When the verbs ‘to do’ or ‘to sing’ are used alongside *mahānanda*, it becomes more explicit that Mahananda is the name of the person who “did,” “made” or “sang” the text. At the end of Chapter 55 the text says:

Visualization of the dramatic part said Mahananda singing,
Tenth (Book) discourse...

*Darasana nūpaka aṃga ko kahyo mahānanda gāi,
Daśama kathā...*

And at the end of Chapter 71:

In this way lord many months stayed; Tenth (Book) beauty, virtues praises sung,
Mahananda vernacular made the seventy first chapter.

*Aiseṃ prabhu vahu māsa rahi daśama nūpa guna gāi,
Mahānanda bhāṣā kie ikahattari adhyāi.*

The phrases “said Mahananda singing (*kahyo mahānanda gāi*)” and “Mahananda vernacular made (*Mahānanda bhāṣā kie*)” imply with greater clarity that Mahananda composed and/or performed the text of the Mahananda Latter Half. We know nothing more about the author

himself, and unless some information has been lost on the damaged colophon page, we may assume that unlike Bhupati, he was not interested in providing his readers with any. Mahananda seems less concerned with a definite identification and enjoys indulging in double entendres.

At the end of Chapter 81 we encounter a second name—Gokuldas:

The Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata* in dramatic form is extremely satisfying,
Vernacular Gokuldas benefit, this is the eighty first chapter.

*Daśama kathā śrī bhāgavata nūpaka ati sukha dāi,
Bhāṣā gokuladāsa hita bhae ekyāsi dhyāi.*

Gokuldas is definitely a proper name, but what should be marked is that *hita* or “benefit” is used alongside it. The same three words occur again at the end of Chapter 85 “*bhāṣā gokuladāsa hita*” or “vernacular Gokuldas benefit” which might be read as “vernacular for the benefit of Gokuldas.” This indicates that this Brajhasha Latter Half is written for the benefit of Gokuldas who could be the patron, or the catalyst that serves as the impetus for the re-telling.³⁹ Perhaps Gokuldas is a later author who undertakes to complete the labor started by Mahananda and the work done by the first author benefits and assists him in his task.

The names Mahananda and Gokuldas occur together only once in the text in the colophon section:

Gokuldas (is the) charming bee, the revered lotus Mahananda.

Gokuladāsa vilāsa ali śrī saroja mahānanda.

Mahananda is the revered lotus from where Gokuldas, the charming bee, derives his nectar. Perhaps Mahananda is the teacher and the source of knowledge and inspiration for his disciple

³⁹ According to Allison Busch (Columbia University), the patronage possibility is the strongest.

Gokuldas, which is why the latter acknowledges that the work done by Mahananda is of benefit to him. The colophon for the 1686 First Half⁴⁰ also brings together Mahananda and the lotus:

Krishna eternally lives in Gokula day and night,
In the heart lotus blooms and Mahananda filled the eyes.

*Śrī gopāla sadā vaseṁ gokula meṁ dīna rena,
Hīya saroja praphulita raheṁ mahānandamaya nena.*

Here, again, the second line can have more than one interpretation including “In the heart the lotus keeps blooming while great joy fills the eyes (on seeing the scene described in the first line)” and “The heart of the lotus (who is the poet) keeps blooming while Mahananda’s eyes have their fill (of the scene described in the first line).” And while the first line appears to say that even after Krishna has physically left Gokula, the place where he spent his idyllic childhood and youth, he remains there forever in spirit, it could also be a gesture towards Gokuldas, within whom Krishna resides perpetually. What this interpretation implies is that the names of Gokuldas and Mahananda occur together in the First Half as well and both are gratified by Krishna’s presence.

The metaphor of the bee is one that occurs elsewhere in the Tenth Book, for example in the characterization of the relationship between Krishna and the *gopīs* of Braj in the First Half. Chapter 47 describes the scene in Braj when Uddhava brings the pining *gopīs* a message from Krishna to assuage their great sorrow at being separated from him.⁴¹ Seeing a black bee, the *gopīs* call it Krishna’s friend saying it is as faithless and treacherous as their lord who “made us drink the bewildering nectar of his lips once, and then abandoned us—just like you immediately

⁴⁰ The last few lines of the colophon are published in ‘Appendix B’ in Anand Krishna, *Malwa Painting*, Benaras: Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1963 and contain the chronogram discussed earlier.

⁴¹ Because Krishna is now living in Mathura/Dwarka.

abandon flowers.”⁴² The bee is Krishna’s messenger, and in the Mahananda Latter Half, Gokuldas, the charming bee, is also Krishna’s envoy, repeating his story to the readers or causing it to be re-told. His exact role depends on whether he is the patron of the work, its muse or part author.

Two authors being involved in the composition of one text was not uncommon in the seventeenth century. John Cort discusses an example from the Jain context where one older, established and skilled poet and a second younger poet together executed the translation of a Sanskrit work.⁴³ The signature of the older poet occurs in twenty-three verses in the beginning of the poem, while that of the younger poet appears in the five last verses. And even though the poets state that this was a collaborative enterprise between two like-minded individuals, based on the appearance of signatures, it would appear that there was a definite division of labor between them. In the text of the Mahananda Latter Half there is a similar division, with Mahananda’s signature occurring in the first part and Gokuldas’ in the last bit. But the question remains whether it was a mutual collaboration, or a case of one author completing the unfinished composition of another, possibly his teacher. The other possibility is that Mahananda and Gokuldas are two names for the same person. Monika Boehm-Tettelbach mentioned to me that sometimes an author has a second name given by the guru and may choose to include either one or both in signing a work.⁴⁴

⁴² Edwin F. Bryant, *Krishna: The Beautiful Legend of God (Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa Book X)*, London and New York: Penguin, 2003, p.196.

⁴³ John Cort, ‘Making it Vernacular in Agra: The Practice of Translation by Seventeenth-century Digambar Jains’ in Francesca Orsini, ed., *Tellings Not Texts: Singing, Story-telling and Performance in North India* (forthcoming).

⁴⁴ Kenneth Bryant also discusses the three different names that Surdas uses to address himself: Krishna-sakha (“Krishna’s friend”) for when he herds cattle with Krishna, Champak-lata as the woman who enjoys Krishna’s love-making at night, and Surdas for the poet who returns from sporting with Krishna and tells the tale through his verse. See his *Poems to the Child-God: Structures and Strategies in the Poetry of Sūrdās*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1978, p.2.

Whoever is the author of the Mahananda Latter Half, we should keep in mind that he is engaged in the re-telling of a story that has passed through the lips of revered figures like Shukadeva. Even if Mahananda is the “author” of a vernacular Tenth Book, he is ultimately one of many conduits that transmit the story of Krishna through the ages. Does Mahananda acknowledge these other narrative voices? Does he signal some sort of belonging to a hallowed story-telling lineage like Bhupati does in the opening lines of his re-telling? Brajdasi follows the Sanskrit in her Tenth Book and includes all the dialogic voices found therein including Shukadeva, Parikshit as well as the *sūta*. Bhupati begins each chapter with “Shuka said” referring to him variously as Shukadeva, Shukamuni, Shukamunideva and Shukracharya. In contrast to them both, Mahananda hardly refers to the framing dialogue of Shukadeva and Parikshit; each is mentioned fewer than ten times. Nor does he offer obeisance to earlier narrators. Chapter 51 tells the story of Kalayavana’s destruction inside a cave by the lethal gaze of a figure woken up from a long sleep. The Sanskrit opens with Shuka’s account of these events at which point Parikshit asks about the identity of the person who destroyed him. Shuka then supplies the name Muchukunda and divulges how he came to be sleeping in the cave. In Mahananda’s re-telling we already know Muchukunda’s name even though Parikshit does question Shuka about the identity of the sleeping figure and the latter says his name again. The Sanskrit maintains a degree of narrative tension by not revealing the name before the question is posed by Parikshit, an element that is missing in Mahananda.

It is difficult to determine why Mahananda excludes the dialogic set up of the Tenth Book which is also not portrayed in the illustrations. But this choice conveys the impression that rather than positioning himself as part of a much longer and revered tradition of narrators, Mahananda has other concerns. Less interested in the dialogue structure or the method of story-

telling, Mahananda's primary intent is communicating the tale itself. His focus is on events and episodes from Krishna's life, and he pays less attention to whose voice is the bearer. This sense of primacy of the actual story is bolstered as we analyze the Mahananda Latter Half more thoroughly.

Mahananda's Re-telling

Mahananda's Latter Half follows the Sanskrit in its chapter divisions and the subject matter contained in each chapter. But as we shall see, this does not mean it is mere repetition that accomplishes nothing new and different.

The story may be the same in two tellings, but the discourse may be vastly different. Even the structures and sequence of events may be the same, but the style, details, tone, and texture—and therefore the import—may be vastly different.⁴⁵

The narrative begins at the same juncture as the Sanskrit when Kamsa is already dead and his wives, Asti and Prapti, go to their father Jarasandha's palace to complain that Krishna is responsible for their widowhood. Bhupati includes a few lines about Akrura's visit to Hastinapura from Chapter 49 of the Sanskrit in his re-telling of the Latter Half, but Mahananda mainly sticks to the Sanskrit right through to the end of Chapter 90. Lalach and Bhupati include episodes not found in the traditional Sanskrit text in their re-tellings of the First Half of the Tenth Book. Both include the description of the evil *brāhmaṇa* Shridhara who is sent by Kamsa to kill Krishna,⁴⁶ an episode that does not exist in the Sanskrit text. Certain stories associated with Krishna were circulating outside the Sanskrit tradition and were popular and familiar enough to be included by Lalach and later Bhupati. Perhaps Bhupati was consulting Lalach, a Sanskrit version other than the traditional one or some other popular account, but it seems that the

⁴⁵ Ramanujan, p.25.

⁴⁶ Niemann, p.26.

traditional Sanskrit text was not the only source for vernacular authors working with the First Half.

Mahananda's re-telling, however, confines itself to the traditional Sanskrit version of events without bringing in material from other sources. There are no extra episodes and details are often reduced. This suggests that perhaps Mahananda did not want to refer to other narratives that were in circulation and he may not even have had access to them, or that there were no other sources that concerned themselves with the Latter Half of the Tenth Book. Unlike the First Half re-tellings where Bhupati could channel Lalach, for example, Mahananda might not have had other earlier vernacular Latter Half narratives he could turn to because this part of Krishna's life never enjoyed the same currency as the First Half. Of course, this analysis would be strengthened if we could determine whether or not Bhupati adds episodes external to the traditional Sanskrit text in his re-telling of the Latter Half as he does with the First Half, which would inform us about the availability of other tellings of the Latter Half. Analyzing Mahananda's methodology in his Brajbhasha First Half would make clear if he consistently follows the Sanskrit. It is possible that Mahananda made a conscious decision to stick with one source only, the traditional Sanskrit one, despite the availability of others. But for now let us say that the Mahananda Latter Half is a re-telling that meticulously follows or refers to the narrative of the traditional Sanskrit text.

I will now present a detailed discussion of specific chapters from the Mahananda Latter Half and, by comparing them with their Sanskrit counterparts, attempt to draw some conclusions about Mahananda's (and/or Gokuldas's) methodology of re-telling. Below is a table that counts

the lines used per chapter in the Sanskrit and Brajbhasha⁴⁷ and places them side by side so that we can assess the relative numbers employed in both:

Chapter number and brief subject matter	Lines in Sanskrit	Lines in Mahananda
50 Battle with Jarasandha, building Dwarka	58	33
51 Destruction of Kalayavana by Muchukunda	64	14
52 Krishna runs away from Jarasandha	44	19
53 Krishna carries away Rukmini	57	25
54 Krishna disgraces Rukmi and marries Rukmini	60	16
55 Pradyumna's birth, Shambara killed by him	40	20
56 Story of the Syamantaka gem	45	28
57 Syamantaka stolen, thief killed	42	21
58 Eight marriages of Krishna	58	32
59 Naraka killed, 16,000 marriages of Krishna	45	28
60 Dialogue between Krishna and Rukmini	59	11
61 Krishna's progeny, Rukmi killed	40	23
62 Aniruddha made captive by Bana	35	20
63 Aniruddha rescued	53	28
64 Story of King Nriga	44	18
65 Balarama diverts the Yamuna	32	14
66 Paundraka and others killed	43	22
67 Dwivida killed by Balarama	28	15
68 Balarama drags Hastinapura	54	32
69 Krishna's household life	45	24
70 Krishna's daily routine	47	20
71 Krishna goes to Indraprastha	46	20
72 Jarasandha killed by Bhima	48	29
73 Krishna returns to Indraprastha	35	13
74 Shishupala killed	53	31
75 Duryodhana humiliated	40	21
76 Shalva's encounter with the Yadavas	33	20
77 Shalva killed	37	21
78 Balarama's pilgrimage where he kills a <i>sūta</i>	40	33
79 Balarama's pilgrimage	34	30
80 Sudama visits Krishna	45	27
81 Krishna eats parched rice brought by Sudama	41	21
82 Krishna meets people from Vrindavana	49	35
83 Draupadi talks to Krishna's wives	43	30
84 Krishna's pilgrimage	71	38
85 Krishna brings his brothers back from the dead	59	25
86 Arjuna carries away Subhadra	59	39

⁴⁷ The last line of each chapter which gives the number and title is not included in the count for the Sanskrit as they are not numbered in the Gita Press edition. Also they appear consistently as separate entities at the end of each chapter which is not always the case in the Mahananda Latter Half, where the last line can contain narrative as well.

87 Question about the <i>Vedas</i>	50	10
88 Krishna helps out Shiva	40	35
89 Krishna brings back dead sons of a <i>brāhmaṇa</i>	66	48
90 Krishna's story narrated	50	42

There are always fewer lines in the Brajbhasha re-telling as compared with the Sanskrit, implying that the former reduces details found in the latter. A quick glance at Chapters 51, 60 and 87 will tell us that in relation to the Sanskrit, Mahananda's Brajbhasha re-telling of these chapters has approximately one-fifth the number of lines, the smallest proportion in the table. I think it would be useful to start here in order to understand broadly what the Brajbhasha re-telling omits, using these three chapters with very different content. Thereafter I will analyze chapters that will help us grasp how the author handles distinct types of subject matter including battles, pilgrimages and domestic scenes. In the previous chapter I discussed illustrations based on these themes from the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and the text-image correspondence will become even clearer after analyzing their textual incarnations. This selection will also tell us how the author deals with the long lists of names (of people, places and weapons) found in the Sanskrit and what the artist makes of them when he paints his pictures. Towards the end I will compare the methodology of the Mahananda Latter Half with the 1686 Brajbhasha First Half and consider the author's larger purpose in this particular re-telling. Does Mahananda provide specific cues, knowing that his text is intended for illustration?

Philosophical Passages Omitted

Chapter 51 of the Latter Half of the Tenth Book tells the story of Kalayavana's destruction at the hands of Muchukunda, as engineered by Krishna. The mighty Kalayavana surrounds Krishna's capital Mathura while it is already under threat from another army. Moving his subjects to the safety of the newly constructed Dwarka, Krishna decides to deal with Kalayavana on his own. Chapter 51 in the Sanskrit, which consists of sixty four lines, begins

with a description of Krishna in his full glory with all the iconography of Vishnu—four arms, the Shrivatsa curl of hair on his chest, the Kaustubha gem around his neck and so on. In Mahananda’s re-telling, Chapter 51 is boiled down to a mere fourteen lines by removing such detailed descriptions of Krishna and proceeding directly to the action. What this omission accomplishes is to avoid making the connection between Krishna and Vishnu, unlike the Sanskrit. Perhaps Mahananda is trying to characterize Krishna as a deity in his own right? Or does this exclusion tell us that Vishnu is less relevant by this point in time?

As Krishna walks out and away from the city, he is pursued by Kalayavana who is unable to catch up, try as he might. Kalayavana chases Krishna into a mountain cave. En route he admonishes Krishna for being the only coward in the Yadava race. Once inside the cave, Kalayavana encounters a sleeping figure that he assumes is Krishna and kicks him, only to be burnt to death by a fiery gaze. This takes us to end of the fourth sentence in Brajbhasha as compared to the twelfth in the Sanskrit. In both texts, Parikshit asks the question on the mind of the readers—who is the sleeping figure? Shuka introduces Muchukunda, son of Mandhata and explains that Muchukunda had indefatigably protected heaven against the demonic races. After this task was accomplished the gods asked him to choose a boon. Being tired he asked for deep sleep and the gods added that the person who dared to wake him would be burnt to death. In the Sanskrit text, Muchukunda’s back story is told in elaborate detail, taking up eight lines. In Brajbhasha, Mahananda uses one. After Kalayavana’s incineration Muchukunda notices the four-armed Krishna and being awe-struck by his “moon-like form” asks him who he is. Again what takes nine lines in Sanskrit is condensed into one in Brajbhasha. Krishna’s reply goes on for eight sentences in Sanskrit, while in the Brajbhasha telling, he speaks for two and half sentences and instructs Muchukunda to ask for a boon.

In the Brajbhasha work, Muchukunda's response is recorded in one sentence, one sentence is used by Krishna to tell Muchukunda that after one more birth as a *brāhmaṇa* he will achieve salvation, and the account comes to an end in the fourteenth sentence with the formulaic chapter closing. In Sanskrit, Muchukunda's response occupies lines 46-58 where he acknowledges his own past failures and weaknesses and seeks refuge in Krishna's "lotus feet" while lines 59-64 are Krishna's benediction. The passage of devotional philosophy where Muchukunda glorifies Krishna is absent from the Brajbhasha work and as we peruse the Mahananda Latter Half, we will notice that throughout, such sections are missing. Philosophical segments would definitely be more difficult to translate into images than those recounting actions, and the fact that they are left out is important in understanding what purpose the text was meant to serve. Was the author trying to make the artist's task easier by subtracting details that would not be illustrated? Can we discern this impulse in other parts of the text as well?

Chapter 60 of the Latter Half of the Tenth Book recounts a dialogue between Krishna and his principal spouse Rukmini, where he teases her about finding a better husband for herself. The sixty lines in the Sanskrit chapter that describe this scene of playful domesticity first provide us with the details of Rukmini's palace. Lines 10-20 are Krishna's teasing words to Rukmini telling her that she was misguided and short-sighted when she chose Krishna over all her other suitors and that maybe she should rethink her decision. Plunged into unhappiness by these words Rukmini faints, and Krishna, designated here as the four-armed lord, revives her and reassures her that he was joking. Rukmini then addresses her husband and in lines 34-43, she glorifies him who is the lord of the universe and extols his greatness, using epithets like "the glorious lord of the three principal deities," "the suzerain lord of the universe," "soul of the universe," "infallible

one” and “slayer of the demon Madhu.”⁴⁸ Through these she draws attention to Krishna’s connection with Vishnu, his position as the supreme deity and his physical prowess. She then professes her unwavering love for Krishna who is pleased with her devotion and lauds her for the remainder of the chapter.

In the Brajbhasha re-telling, on the other hand, Chapter 60 consists of only eleven lines and the passages that exalt Krishna are omitted just as they were for Chapter 51. The first line tells us that Krishna is seated while Rukmini is fanning him, the description of the palace consists of two lines, Krishna’s teasing of two and a half, and the rest is Rukmini’s fainting and revival. The glorification of Krishna found in Sanskrit lines 34-43 is completely omitted as is Krishna’s praise of Rukmini’s devotion. There are no hyperbolic epithets but the reference to Krishna as *caturabhuja* (“four arms”) is retained from the Sanskrit while saying that he lifts up the prostrate Rukmini (*Āpu caturabhuja nūpa hari ke sa uṭhae āmhi*). In the previous chapter I discussed how in the depiction of this episode, the artist is very careful about portraying all four arms (Plate 1.34). There are only a handful of times when multiple arms are given to Krishna and in each case, the representation is prompted, in some way, by the text. Here, for instance, there is a clear reference to the four arms in the text and also in the image that illustrates it.

In Chapters 51 and 60, the Brajbhasha poet is primarily interested in the narration of events and does not concern himself with reminding readers, through the voices of Rukmini and Muchukunda, of Krishna’s greatness. There is a balance between philosophy and action in the Sanskrit with is purposefully skewed in favor of the latter in the vernacular, altering the very spirit of the work. But what is the result when the Brajbhasha author is faced with a chapter that is almost completely abstract? Chapter 87 is one of the most esoteric chapters in the Tenth Book, containing the speech uttered by the *Vedas* in praise of *brahman* “the supreme being.”

⁴⁸ Goswami, pp.375-6.

Shukadeva recounts it in response to Parikshit's question about how the *Vedas*, given their nature, can speak about the formless and indescribable Supreme Being. In the Sanskrit telling, the author first relates how the question is not a new one and explains that it has been asked before by great sages like Narada in earlier times and debated by them in holy hermitages. The authoritative voice that is ultimately channeled to answer the question is another great sage, Sanandana's, who says that just as a court bard will wake the emperor from slumber by singing his praises and recounting his glory, the *Vedas* exalt the Supreme Being as he sleeps after absorbing into himself the universe he had previously created. What follows is a deeply philosophical passage about liberation attainable through god's grace and the unfathomable nature of the *brahman*. Over thirty lines are taken up by this metaphysical exploration.

Turning to the Brajbhasha, however, we will see that the author has completely omitted this entire "uneventful" section and confines himself to the frame of how the question had been posed many times over, who answers it and where, and the departure of sage Narada from the hermitage:

Parikshit asks, the *Vedas* refer to Brahma,
How is it possible for the seers⁴⁹ to describe the distinctionless Brahma?
(When) the *Vedas* possess qualities. Hearing this Sukadeva ponders,
In order to remove doubt he decides to tell the story.
Listen to the conversation of Narayana and Narada.
One time when Narada⁵⁰ when to the Badrinath hermitage,
There with the seers of Kalapa was Narayana himself.
Sitting there and bowing he asked,
The question you just put to me, Narada asked.
Hearing it, the seer replied. Listen to that (reply) Mahananda.
He said that when you had gone to the middle of Swetadeep,⁵¹
To see the lord then this very question was posed.

⁴⁹ The seers who composed the *Vedas*.

⁵⁰ *Vidhi suta* or "Brahma's son" refers to Narada.

⁵¹ Literally "white island."

In Satyalok⁵² Sanaka and other sages in their time asked this question.
And then, there Sanandana said, leaving worldly desire,
O Sanaka and others, when the lord withdraws into himself the universe,
And sleeps, then the *Vedas* describe his greatness,
The way that bards sing the praises of the king and wake him
From sleep, at the end of time, Narada was told that.
After Narada offered obeisance to Narayana he took his leave,
And went to his home feeling satisfied, this is the eighty-seventh chapter.

*Pūchata haim parichata yahai nigamahi brahma paratva,
Kaiseṁ kai saṁbhavahi riṣi nirguna brahma susatva.
Veda saguna hai suni kahem śrī śukadeva vicāri,
Yā saṁdeha nivartta hita kahoṁ kathā niradhāri.
Nārāyana nārada bhayau vāda sunau ava soi,
Ekasameṁ vidhi suta gae vadrikāśrama joi.
Taham kalāpa vāsī riṣini juta nārāyana āpu,
Vaiṭhe tahām pranāma kari pūchyau yahai pratāpu.
Praśna ju tuma hamasoṁ karī pūchī nārada soi,
Riṣini sunata uttara diyau sunau mahānada soi.
Kahī ki java tuma gae he svetadīpa ke māṁha,
Prabhu darasana koṁ tava yahī praśna karī riṣi nāmha.
Satyaloka sanakādi kari āpu sameṁ yaha praśna,
Kiyau hutau tava sanandana kahata chāṁdi jaga traśna.
E sanakādi java prabhū viśva līna kari āpa,
Pauḍhata hem tava veda jaśa varanata hem su pratāpa.
Jaiseṁ vandī jaśa varani kahem nrapani vara hlāi,
Nidrā anta sameṁ savai nārada yahai sunāi.
Vidā kie su pranāma kari nārāyana riṣi rāi,
Cale dhāma nija māni sukha yahai satāsī dhyāi.*

It is clear that Mahananda regards philosophy and esoteric descriptions of divine power as unimportant. In a chapter whose main point in the Sanskrit is to explain god's greatness, the vernacular author disregards over thirty lines. He completely transforms the character of the chapter, making it almost unnecessary to the forward movement of the story. But rather than deleting the entire chapter, the author retains a semblance, almost for the sake of appearance, perhaps to remain somewhat faithful to the Sanskrit text's structure. We might also mark that it is the shortest chapter in the Brajbhasha text. Turning to Bhupati, we will notice that he does not

⁵² The abode of Brahma.

make it a point to exclude philosophical passages, thereby imparting a personality to his re-telling distinct from Mahananda's, and his rendition of Chapter 87 is nowhere near the shortest.

Digressing briefly into the realm of images, we will see that each of these short Brajbhasha chapters is managed in a single illustration in the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*. But for every one of them the artistic methodology is distinct, specifically tailored to the subject matter being depicted. Plate 1.40 is a depiction of Chapter 51, the destruction of Kalayavana by Muchukunda, which I mentioned in the previous and discuss in greater detail in the next chapter. The main occurrences that make up the story—Krishna being chased by Kalayavana, the latter kicking awake the sleeping Muchukunda inside a cave and then being burned to death, Muchukunda adoring Krishna and finally, the departure from the cave—are all present, and the image seems like a hotchpotch of figures, the storyline near impossible to follow unless one is familiar with it. Plate 1.34, which portrays Chapter 60, presents a more symmetrical organization with Krishna enthroned almost in the middle of the palace, being fanned by Rukmini and pampered by attendants. To the immediate right of this snapshot is the episode of Rukmini fainting and the four-armed Krishna lifting her up. Two significant events are placed next to each other and it is the task of the viewer to “read” the tale therein. The artist employs a different tactic in illustrating Chapter 87. Plate 2.1 paints the scene of a forest hermitage with blue-hued Narayana occupying center stage. All the inhabitants of the hermitage are engaged in their respective activities as Narada, identified by the double gourd string instrument he carries, enters and leaves from the left. He is represented four times, the artist stressing his movement in contrast to everyone else's stasis.⁵³ The three images follow the Brajbhasha text closely and the artist's focus is on presenting moments of action.

⁵³ A preference for symmetrical composition is seen in the last two of these three images, leading me to ask if they could have been planned and/or executed by the same artist.

Pilgrimages, Battles and Domestic Scenes

The three Brajbhasha chapters discussed above contain the least number of lines in comparison to the Sanskrit Latter Half of the Tenth Book. In contrast, Chapter 79 contains an almost equal number of lines in Sanskrit and Brajbhasha with thirty four in the former and thirty in the latter. Balarama rather than Krishna is the protagonist here and it is the chapter that follows his killing of the *sūta*, mentioned earlier, for which he must atone by vanquishing a monster who was disturbing the sages of the Naimisha forest hermitage. Further, he must undertake a pilgrimage across India, bathing in different sanctified rivers to wash away his sins. The first section states how Balarama decapitates the demonic and troublesome Bilwala, with Mahananda using only a line and half less than his Sanskrit counterpart:

When the fortnight is over then on the sacrificial ground comes
A rain of blood and pus and the sages are very afraid.
Then, a very black form with copper-like hair,
Beard, moustache, scary eyebrows and ghastly eyes,
Like a mountain of soot and carrying a trident, Balarama sees.
Calling the plough and pestle they appear immediately.
Then Balarama, with his plough, drags the demonic Bilwala. His head
(Balarama) strikes with the pestle so that bloody rivers flow on earth.
Like a mountain the demon falls to the ground and dies, the sages see.
With happy hearts they bless Balarama and anoint him,
Like Indra was anointed by the gods after defeating Vritrasura.
They anoint him and present him with many clothes and ornaments.
Balarama takes a forest garland (associated with Vishnu) and departs with the
permission of the sages.

Mahananda then enumerates the multiple pilgrimage places visited by Balarama in almost the same order as they occur in the Sanskrit including holy rivers and lakes, hermitages of revered sages, venerated mountains and homes of the gods, providing readers with an immaculate guidebook to sacred India.⁵⁴

(Balarama) goes and bathes in the Kaushiki river and beyond the lake
To where the Sarayu emerges, he catches that road.

⁵⁴ Some of the sites have been named in the previous chapter.

And reaching the pilgrimage site he bathes, gives water to the gods, chants and is
at peace.

Reaching the hermitage of sage Pulaha he bows down to him,
Going and bathing in the Gomati he proceeds in the direction of the river Gandaki.
Bathing in the rivers Vishala and Shona he goes to Gaya,
He worships the manes and bathes in the midst of the Ganga.
Then he approaches Mahendra mountain to pay his respects to Parashurama,
Seeing him Balarama bows down, who is beautiful and satisfying.
Later bathing in the seven Godavari streams he bathes in the Vena,
Pampa and Bhimarathi and then happily meditates on the son of Shiva.
Obtaining Shiva's sight on Shri mountain he adores him with the sages.
Balarama heads to the Dravida territory with many sages to (visit) sacred places.
There he visits Kinkata mountain and is pleased.
He travels to many cities named Kanchi and then reaches the Kaveri river.
Then he goes to Shriranga where Vishnu resides
Eternally, then Rishabha mountain, a region scared to Vishnu.
Then with a southerly route he arrives at Mathura,
Crossing a dam he reaches Rameshvara where he gives away cows.
After giving away ten thousand cows he proceeds to the Kritmala river,
And via the Tamraparni river he goes to Malayachal mountain.
At this mountain the sage Agastya resides,
Bowing down (Balarama) takes the blessings of the great ascetic.
In the middle of water he sees the form of Aryadevi,
Then he heads to Suryakara and bathes in the supreme Tapi.
The rivers Payoshni and Nirvindhya he bathes in and then visits
The Dandaka forest, the Rewa river and the city Mahishmat.
After bathing at Manutirtha he reaches the Prabhas region,
There he hears about the war between the Kauravas and Pandavas.

After the pilgrimage, the chapter continues with Balarama's futile attempts to prevent the
war between the Pandavas and Kauravas, and his decision to refrain from participating in it by
retiring again to the forest to impart wisdom to the sages dwelling there.

Many warriors are already dead and now Duryodhana and Bhima
Are fighting. Hearing this he heads to Kurukshetra for (the sake of) peace.
Hearing that Balarama has come to Kurukshetra, Yudhishtira
(And) Krishna proceed to meet him and offer the appropriate obeisance.
Balarama goes and sees Duryodhana and Bhima
(Engaged in) mace fighting manoeuvres of various kinds, circling the battlefield.
Then Balarama says, you both are matched in strength,
For me you are equal and between you whosoever's glory wanes,
I will not be pleased and therefore do not fight.
They hear him but do not obey, remembering offensive words.
Instantly Balarama realizes that destiny is at work,

What has to happen will happen. He returns to Dwarka
Where King Ugrasena and others come forward happily to greet him.
The citizens offer obeisance and make him comfortable at home.
After staying for some days Balarama goes to Naimisha forest
Where he performs sacrifices, his countenance like the sky, and gives this gift.⁵⁵
As a splendid honorarium the lord gives them knowledge of the self which grants
salvation.⁵⁶
Listening to the qualities of Lord Balarama this is the seventy-ninth chapter.

In the re-telling of Chapter 79 which has less philosophy and more place names, we see that Mahananda is careful about accurate cataloguing and even though he omits a few sites,⁵⁷ it seems that he referred to the actual Sanskrit text.⁵⁸ One almost gets the sense that he kept the Sanskrit work open next to him as he composed his Brajbhasha one. Bhupati's re-telling of Chapter 79, in contrast, mentions only a handful of the pilgrimage sites visited by Balarama. Obviously the two Brajbhasha authors have different intentions in their re-tellings of the same episodes, even though their works were written just one year apart.

There are a few other chapters that contain lists of names such as those of weapons and holy men, and Mahananda consults the Sanskrit text in almost every case to present a precise record. For example, Chapter 63 describes the epic battle between Krishna and Shiva, discussed in the previous chapter, which comes about because Bana, a great devotee of Shiva, imprisons Krishna's grandson Aniruddha. The reason behind the detention is that Aniruddha had secreted himself in the women's quarters in Bana's palace and was carrying on an affair with Bana's daughter. In order to rescue his grandson, Krishna is compelled to fight Shiva who is sworn to protect Bana. The clash between Krishna and Shiva is unlike any ordinary mortal one and the

⁵⁵ Or, They perform sacrifices, at the end of which the sages are given the following gift.

⁵⁶ My thanks to Monika Boehm-Tettelbach and John S. Hawley (Columbia University) for helping with the last few lines of this translation.

⁵⁷ Among the few left out are Kanyakumari, Phalgun, Kerala, Trigarta and Gokarna, after the visit to Agastya.

⁵⁸ Or that they both referred to the same source.

two divines use supernatural weaponry against each other. The names of these extraordinary missiles are provided for the readers of both the Sanskrit and Brajbhasha works and though Mahananda leaves out the first Brahmastra (“weapon of Brahma”) which both use against each other, the remainder of the weapons are the same as in Sanskrit. I have mentioned them all in the previous chapter. The Brajbhasha chapter is of twenty eight lines, about half the number of the Sanskrit with its fifty three and again the reduction comes from excluding the praises of Krishna which characterize him as first among the gods that are recited by Shiva’s *jvara* or fever spirit that is defeated by Krishna and then by Shiva himself who suffers a similar fate.

My third list is from Chapter 74 where we have an inventory of thirty sages (in the Sanskrit text) who attend a fire sacrifice in the capital of the Pandavas. Mahananda leaves out only two, though he does vary the order in which they occur. I am primarily interested in understanding how the artist deals with these catalogues of names of places, weapons and people and as we have seen in the previous chapter, he always remains within the parameters set by the Brajbhasha text. The artist depicts every pilgrimage site, differentiating between water bodies, mountains and cities, and Balarama is made to perform the specified activity in each place (Plates 1.27 and 1.28, the former discussed in detail in the previous chapter). Similarly, the weapons used by Krishna and Shiva are delineated with their special properties and one can recognize them instantly in Plate 1.9. The sages, however, are not all present in the corresponding illustration of the fire sacrifice (Plate i.2). Without labels, there is no way of distinguishing between the many sages, unlike with weapons and pilgrimage sites. In my opinion, this is the reason why the artist was unable to represent exactly what the Brajbhasha text says for the third list and provides us with a generalized gathering of sages and holy men instead.

There is one place where the Brajbhasha author decides to exclude a list—Chapter 61 in the Sanskrit tells us that each of Krishna’s 16,108 wives gives him ten sons and what follows are the names of the sons of each of his eight principal queens. These eighty princes are not individually recorded by Mahananda. Only Pradyumna is mentioned and then Krishna’s grandson from Pradyumna, Aniruddha. It is unclear to me why this particular catalogue does not find a place in the vernacular work when the inventory of sages does. Perhaps Krishna’s progeny other than Pradyumna are of no interest and serve no narrative purpose? They might even be considered unimportant as they perform no great feats in the Tenth Book. It is only their total number which is awe-inspiring, not their names. The list of sages, in contrast, imparts an air of authority to the fire sacrifice and tells readers that a large group of highly revered personages participated in the rites. Plate 1.29 illustrates Krishna’s wives serving him on the left half of the page and him surrounded by his progeny on the right. His eight main queens are represented on the right side but not each of their ten sons.

After looking at a battle, a pilgrimage and a sacrifice, we finally turn our attention to Chapter 70 of the Latter Half of the Tenth Book, which provides its audience with a glimpse of Krishna’s routine on a regular day when he is not fighting wars or rescuing princesses. The Sanskrit text makes use of forty seven lines while in Brajbhasha the number is twenty and I will scrutinize the first part of this chapter before Krishna is called away to save captured kings. The first line in Brajbhasha tells us that at dawn, the sound of cocks and other birds wake Krishna and dreading his imminent departure from their arms, his wives are saddened. What follows is a terse register of Krishna’s movements:

He meditated on his own true form, took a bath,
Put on his unstitched garment, repeated god’s name, poured oblations on the
sacred fire and read scriptures.
And then offered water to his forefathers, worshipped sages and gave away cows,

*Kari sātṛvika nija nūpa ko dhyāna kiyo asnāna,
Dhotī kari japa karata prabhu agini homa paṛhi bhāna.
Bahuri pitra tarapana kiṃyao dvija pūjana go dāna,*

Already the Brajbhasha author has removed abstract ideas from his re-telling. The Sanskrit phrasing “and with a serene mind meditate on the Self beyond (the realm of) Prakṛti, that is one without a second, self-luminous and indestructible, which is why virtue of its own nature eternally free from the taint of Avidyā (nescience), which goes by the name of Brahma, whose existence and blissful nature are indicated by His own potencies (under the names of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra) that are responsible for the appearance (maintenance) and destruction of the universe”⁵⁹ becomes “meditated on his own true form” in Brajbhasha. Mahananda also refrains from elaborate descriptions of the cows that are given away, for example, in contrast to the Sanskrit where we are told about “thirteen thousand and eighty-four freshly calved and beautifully caparisoned cows, docile by nature, yielding abundant milk and accompanied with their calf, with their horns plated with gold, and hoofs with silver, and their necks decked with pearl necklaces.”⁶⁰

Mahananda continues with his catalogue of Krishna’s movements, saying he bows to his preceptors, wears ornaments, applies pigments to his body, looks in the mirror, listens to the requests of his subjects and finds solutions to their problems and finally climbs onto his chariot holding the hand of his charioteer and accompanied by Uddhav and Satyaki, makes his way to Sudharma, the council hall. In this great hall, Krishna sits on the throne and is entertained by jesters, musicians, dancers and dramatists, the singing of his praises by bards, and the recitation of the *Purāṇas* and histories by sages. Most of the activities are similar to the Sanskrit, but

⁵⁹ Goswami, p.414.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

described much more sparsely without any amplification and embellishment. Each activity from Krishna's schedule is illustrated by the artist on a single page which is divided into many compartments (Plate 2.2, we can follow Krishna as he wakes up in the top left corner to the council hall in the bottom right). As I explained in the previous chapter, this is the typical arrangement adopted in the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* for the depiction of snapshots from domestic life, and I believe the artist is striving for visual legibility where the broad theme of an image can be immediately apprehended by a mere glance at page composition.

A Mahananda First Half?

I will analyze one part of a chapter from the Brajbhasha First Half text that I believe is the pair of the Mahananda Latter Half, in order to understand whether it was indeed composed by the same author and if, given the wider popularity of the First Half, there is a difference in the re-telling of the two halves. This is Chapter 34 which describes a pilgrimage made by Krishna, his family and the cowherds, and Krishna's defeat of Shankhachuda who was harassing the womenfolk of Braj. While the Sanskrit chapter contains thirty two lines, the one in Brajbhasha is made up of twenty. The first seven lines in both works run almost parallel: Nanda (Krishna's foster father), Sunanda (Nanda's brother), Krishna, Balarama and the other cowherds and their families make a pilgrimage to the Ambika forest in order to worship the Goddess. They first bathe in the waters of the Sarasvati river there and then enter the temple to worship the goddess Parvati as well as her consort Shiva. After the rituals are completed Nanda and the others give customary gifts of cows, clothes and food to the *brāhmaṇas* present there and the entire group spends the night on the banks of the river. During the course of the night, a giant serpent appears and swallows Nanda, bringing us to the end of the fifth line in both texts. The next two lines

narrate how the other cowherds try unsuccessfully to help Nanda, before Krishna's arrival, by hitting the serpent with fire-brands.

The Brajbhasha re-telling now requires just six lines to complete the tale of the serpent: Krishna kicks the serpent, who, being liberated by the pure touch of the lord casts off his reptilian form and assumes his true superhuman persona of a *vidyādhara* (semi-gods who possess magical powers and can fly). His name is given to us as Sudarshana and he folds his hands in respect to Krishna. Krishna comments on his beauty and asks why he had assumed the repulsive incarnation of a snake, to which the semi-god responds that he is a *vidyādhara* named Sudarshana who had been turned into a snake by sage Angira's curse and had now been freed by Krishna. Krishna's sacred appearance had rescued him and restored his heavenly body. Then Sudarshana respectfully circumambulates Krishna (as one would a deity in a temple), bows to him and leaves for his heavenly abode. The thirteenth line says that in this way Nanda is rescued and Krishna's glory is sung by all the cowherds.

The Sanskrit work, on the other hand, uses twelve lines to reach the same point, spending more time firstly on Sudarshana's pride which caused him to be cursed, and then on his glorification of Krishna. Sudarshana uses epithets like "father of the universe," "dispeller of sorrows," "great *yogi*," "supreme person," "immortal lord" and "protector of the righteous,"⁶¹ none of which occur in the Brajbhasha re-telling. Also, the Sanskrit author takes four lines for Sudarshana's grateful exaltation of Krishna, which is accomplished in one line in Brajbhasha. Just like in the Mahananda Latter Half, in the First Half too the author is more interested in presenting the narrative elements of the story and does not refer to Krishna's divine nature either through the use of hyperbolic epithets or by indulging in long philosophical expositions. My

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.245.

examination of other chapters gives rise to similar conclusions. Based on the primacy of action in both halves, the close adherence to the traditional Sanskrit text and the use of *mahānanda* to simultaneously suggest the author's name and "great joy," I conclude that both parts were composed by the same author, Mahananda.⁶²

Mahananda's Purpose

We now know that by 1688, Mahananda had completed his action-oriented Brajbhasha re-telling of the complete Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Apart from this, we have very little information about the author, his audience and his goals, and must draw our conclusions based on the manner in which Krishna's story is presented. In her discussion of Hariram Vyas's sixteenth-century Brajbhasha *Rāsa-pañcādhyāyī*, a re-telling of five chapters from the First Half that describe Krishna's famous round dance with the *gopīs*, Heidi Pauwels makes important observations about the poet's method.⁶³ In a gesture that she calls "playing down Krishna's majesty," she notices how Vyas does away with "majestic epithets"⁶⁴ and calls Krishna by more intimate names throughout the text. This helps establish a more informal relationship between Krishna and the *gopīs* he dallies with, placing them on an equal footing and bridging the deity-worshipper gap that exists therein. Like Mahananda, Vyas also omits philosophical passages and avoids interrupting the action by excluding the dialogue between Parikshit and Shukadeva.⁶⁵ Most interested in expounding the erotic sports of Krishna, he does not feel the need to justify them, unlike the Sanskrit *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* which contains "lengthy speculations on its

⁶² And perhaps Gokuldas was also part of the picture in an authorial capacity.

⁶³ Heidi Pauwels, *Kṛṣṇa's Round Dance Reconsidered: Harirām Vyās's Hindī Rāsa-pañcādhyāyī*, London Studies on South Asia No.12, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.169.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.172.

symbolic meaning in the light of the theory of ecstatic devotion.”⁶⁶ Mahananda includes Parikshit and Shukadeva’s interaction on only a handful of occasions in his re-telling, and in many respects his methodology is similar to Vyas. It seems clear that he is primarily interested in conveying action and for the most part eschews philosophical “digressions” that impede the progress of the action. But while Pauwels manages to tease out what Vyas accomplishes in his re-telling with respect to the part of Krishna’s story he is dealing with, I am less sure of Mahananda’s aims beyond the story-telling one. Perhaps he knew that his text was intended for illustration and made changes accordingly, excluding what was difficult to illustrate like esoteric sections and retaining details which he felt should be incorporated such as names of pilgrimage sites and divine weaponry.

I would like to return to one particular instance where the Mahananda Latter Half omits an event present in the Sanskrit, thereby altering the narrative to an extent, which I mentioned briefly in the previous chapter. This is the only example I have found where the Brajbhasha author takes such an authoritative step. Chapter 77 relates the conclusion of the encounter between Shalva, the owner of a magical flying machine, and Krishna, who ultimately emerges triumphant. According to the Sanskrit reportage of events, at one point during the battle, Shalva vanishes and a messenger comes to Krishna bearing the terrible news that Krishna’s father has been captured by the enemy. Krishna is deeply troubled and Shalva re-appears with his prized captive, beheading him before Krishna’s eyes. Krishna is plunged into distress at the death of his father but realizes a second later that Shalva had created an illusion—his father was actually alive and well. At this point the narrator of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Shuka, airs his suspicions about the veracity of this account because Krishna, the Supreme Being, cannot be deluded. He

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.173.

attributes it to a few sages “who do not care so much for consistency.”⁶⁷ Mahananda chooses not to describe Krishna’s moment of human-like weakness and succinctly says that even though Shalva tries to exercise his demonic powers, none of it works on Krishna. Is this a deliberate choice made by the author to purge any evidence of Krishna’s vulnerabilities? Or is it an instance of removing excessive details unnecessary to the advancement of the story as Mahananda does throughout his re-telling? Similar issues will come up for discussion when I examine copy sets made after the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* where an apparent act of cowardice in the model is made to appear like a moment of bravery in the copies. The artist of the copy sets moves away from the textual narrative and transforms what the image conveys, re-telling the story according to his own understanding and requirements. The question is, was this modification made with a view to alter the narrative and should it be considered a “mistake?” I attempt to answer this question in the next chapter by exploring how the copy artist would have thought and worked. We might make note of the fact that Bhupati does mention Krishna’s *bhrama* or momentary delusion in his re-telling of Chapter 77.

Layout

On the pages of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, the Mahananda Latter Half text is written in black with red used for the stops between halves of lines, for the numbers at the end of each line and for the chapter number indicated at the end of every chapter (Plate 2.3). The entire text written on one page has a yellow border (with black outlines) around it in a rectangular shape, which was drawn after the text was inscribed. Depending on the amount of the text, the dimensions of these rectangles change, and the lettering is not of a uniform size throughout the manuscript. An homage is included at the end of the text on five of the first ten pages and a few

⁶⁷ Goswami, p.444.

more times in the rest of the manuscript. These can be in red or black and are dedicated to Krishna, occasionally using different names such as “*gopījana vallabhāya*” (“*gopīs*’ beloved” or “beloved of the *gopīs*”) and “*duṣṭa mardanāya*” (“evil-doers’ destroyer” or “destroyer of evil-doers”)⁶⁸ to address him. On the tenth page, the personage saluted is Shrinathji.

Until page 36, only chapter numbers are provided at the end of each chapter. From page 37 onwards, page numbers are included as well, and they get inserted before the chapter number at the end of a chapter. From Chapter 86, which starts on leaf 102, till the end of the manuscript, all chapter numbers and page numbers are omitted. The lack of uniform method in numbering suggests that more than one scribe was engaged in inscribing the text. This impression is strengthened by the fact that occasionally, the red elements of the text such as stops and numbers will be arranged artistically to produce an interesting design, giving us a glimpse into the scribe’s aesthetic sensibilities. Pages that have a large volume of text for the scribe to play around with produce the best patterns (Plate 2.3).

Conclusion

Thinking in terms of re-tellings rather than translations is very liberating for works that then no longer need to be judged according to accuracy and faithfulness to a source text. This is particularly productive in the case of the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, a narrative that circulated widely in both oral and written forms, and was (and actually still is) re-told according to the particular story-teller and audience. Most re-tellings of the Tenth Book do not even have a single original text on which they depend and therefore, do not fulfill the conditions of linguistic translation. Re-telling, on the other hand, implies both a repetition of the act of telling, but also telling anew, or a change in the form and/or content, and seems better suited in characterizing the

⁶⁸ The Sanskrit dative is used in these two epithets.

Tenth Book. The term also allows different Tenth Books with very distinct personalities to exist side by side without one being evaluated as better than all others.

The Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* has a long and illustrious history, but the last part of the seventeenth century is especially important as this is the first time that complete vernacular re-tellings of it were written down. After one hundred and fifty years of only First Halves, the Latter Half finally makes an appearance and within a span of two years we have as many such works. Even a cursory examination will tell us that the intentions of Bhupati and Mahananda, the authors of our two contemporaneous Latter Halves, are quite different. The former tells us a little bit about himself, retains the dialogic structure between Shukadeva and Parikshit, and does not abjure philosophy. The latter's identity, in contrast, is an enigma. Mahananda's is an action-oriented narrative closely based on the traditional Sanskrit text that does away with the framing dialogue, esoteric segments and passages that praise Krishna. The main intention seems to be to carry forward Krishna's story rapidly without unnecessary digressions. Significantly, Bhupati's text is primarily transmitted in the Persian script while Mahananda's is pictorialized, the entire manuscript, text and image being copied soon after. The audience for which Bhupati is writing is quite different from Mahananda's.

The near absence of devotional philosophy in the Mahananda Latter Half is suggestive. What come to the fore in this work are Krishna's bravery, virility and political acumen through an emphasis on his exploits and deeds, which also makes it an ideal text to illustrate. Readers are not constantly reminded of Krishna's divinity and greatness through the words of adoring devotees, but can gauge his superhuman abilities for themselves. As I elaborate in a later chapter, perhaps this has to do with the nature of the readers and viewers who were engaging with the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*. Scholars that work with the *Rāmāyaṇa* have analyzed some of the

innumerable re-tellings of the epic in relation to the socio-historical background in which they signified⁶⁹ and Heidi Pauwels has taken up different re-tellings of particular episodes from the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* with a similar goal.⁷⁰ A more contextual and comparative examination of re-tellings of the Tenth Book (First and Latter Halves) needs to be undertaken to help us comprehend how different social groups were engaging with Krishna and the manner in which he was perceived and portrayed by them, adding greater depth to our understanding of the myriad forms of this illustrious god.

⁶⁹ Paula Richman, 'Introduction', in *Many Rāmāyaṇas*.

⁷⁰ Pauwels, *Round Dance* and 'Stealing a Willing Bride: Women's Agency in the Myth of Rukmiṇī's Elopement', *JRAS, Series 3*, 17, 4 (2007), pp.407-441.

3: THE KANORIA *BHĀGAVATA* AND ITS COPIES

Introduction

In a lively battle scene with arrows flying in all directions, blue-hued Krishna and his fairer, older brother Balarama, rage against a variety of human and demonic foes (Plate 3.2). On the top right and lower middle part of the page the duo strike down their opponents and at the top center they sit together sorting out the spoils of war while more enemies attack on chariots and on foot from the left. This is an image that portrays the chaos of war as well as the bravery and valor of the divine brothers who seem to successfully deal with rival armies unassisted. At first glance, despite variations in color, size of figures and their placement, and spatial divisions, it seems very similar to a second image of the same subject from the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* (Plate 3.1) to the extent that we might consider a relationship of “copying” to exist between the two. As soon as we realize this, our initial reaction might be to try and determine which the original is and which the copy and we will start to notice the little details that could provide us with a clue. We may then mark that in the bottom register where Krishna and Balarama seem to fight a demon in Plate 3.2, bloodying him with their weapons, in the other they carry no weapons and the bloodied demon occupies a separate space designated by its different background color.

Turning the page from the Kanoria set over, the text on the reverse reveals that Krishna and Balarama were running away from the battlefield with the enemy in hot pursuit¹ and that is the scene portrayed in the lower part of Plate 3.1. The text behind Plate 3.2, which is number nine in the manuscript, belongs to the previous painting in the manuscript, number eight, and the text belonging to the present image is on the reverse of the next painting, number ten. Hence, the text on the reverse of each image does not correspond to that image, but to the one just before it

¹ All stories discussed in this chapter are based on the version of events described in the Brajhasha text on the reverse of the paintings. All translations are my own.

in the manuscript, unlike the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*. Despite the different arrangement of text and image, the texts themselves are identical, and the story recounted is Krishna battling with his enemies, sending back the spoils of war, and finding the city surrounded by a new enemy, rushing away to safety with Balarama.

It is the image from the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* that evinces closer correspondence between the visual and written subject matter that says the heroes ran away, while the other depicts Krishna and Balarama defeating the monstrous foe at their feet. The artist of Plate 3.2 seems to assume that the divine brothers would smite their enemies always and thereby creates a discrepancy between the narrative content of text and image. Based on this and several other examples discussed later in the chapter, I posit that the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* is the “model” manuscript. It seems unlikely that the other painting would have come first and the Kanoria artist would copy and simultaneously make alterations to the painting in order to depict the story more precisely. Enough such “narrative discrepancies” occur in the copy paintings where the Kanoria set visualizes the story more accurately to cement its position as the model. I would like to point out however, that it is in these moments of discrepancy that the copy artist’s engagement with contemporary sectarian concerns, literary trends, artistic strategies and popular culture is subtly manifest and “discrepancy” is used to mean the actual fact of the story conveyed in text and image not matching up rather than a value judgement.

After extensive fieldwork I have established that at least one complete copy set was made after the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* of which I have found about fifty pages (including Plate 3.2 discussed above) from different points in the manuscript.² This set is dispersed. A large

² Anand Krishna was the first to notice the similarity between these two sets. He makes a brief reference to it in *Malwa Painting*, Benaras: Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1963, p.28, but without suggesting that a relationship of copying exists between them.

proportion of the pages I have found are in the Kala Bhavan Museum, Varanasi, and I will therefore refer to the manuscript as the Dispersed Kala Bhavan Latter Half. A few copy pages from another set are also extant, and though their number is not as many as the Dispersed Kala Bhavan set, I nevertheless believe that it was complete as well. I learnt of the existence of this set through the collection of Dr. Seitz in Bonn, Germany, and call it the Dispersed Seitz Latter Half. In both copy sets, the text that corresponds to an image occurs on the reverse of the next image as described above, though the content is identical. This feature that has not been marked previously and it is essential to be aware of the different arrangement in order to identify depicted episodes with certainty.³ In the few instances where I have found a painting in both the copy sets, it seems the copies resemble each other more closely than they do the model Kanoria one, which raises the issue about the relationship between the two copy sets. Were they were produced concurrently or very close together in the same workshop? Both copy manuscripts have been dated to ca.1700 and are categorized as Malwa. I will discuss the problems of the Malwa classification in the next chapter but what it means is that the attribution does not really tell us whether the copy manuscripts were made in the same workshop as the Kanoria set, or at a different one with the artists emulating the style of the model. I will lay out the possibilities at the end of this chapter but propose that we study this group of three manuscripts as part of a much broader socio-cultural context mentioned in the previous chapter where the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries are viewed as significant and transformative in the life of the Tenth Book.

³ Discussing a single leaf from one of the copy sets, where the text inscribed behind does not correspond with the image due to the manuscript's particular planning, Joseph Dye is less sure in identifying the scenes and thinks the painting is unsuccessful in conveying the textual narrative. But knowing that the text belongs to the previous image, we understand the situation differently. Joseph M. Dye, *The Arts of India: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*, London:Philip Wilson, 2001, pp.321-3.

This chapter addresses the issue of copying as manifest in three manuscripts of the Latter Half of the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and demonstrates that there are important questions to be asked beyond which is the model and which the copy. After a definition of terms I discuss the method of production, the significance of what is copied in a page and what is left out, as well as the possible motivations behind copying. I have identified three categories of copies—reproductions, imitations and versions—that exist between the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and its copies, and within these one can discern three distinct kinds of variations: one as a result of oversight or not noticing a detail, the second due to different aesthetic and design principles and the third due to the copy artist's impulse to correct what he perceives as the Kanoria artist's mistakes. It is imperative to recognize non-mechanical copying as a creative process in its own right. By alluding to the importance of this practice throughout history, I show that terms with a derogatory connotation like lack of originality, conservative, plagiarism, forgery and counterfeit are not necessarily the ones we should associate with copying. Most model and copy examples presented here will compare the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* with the Dispersed Kala Bhavan Latter Half. The larger numbers of the latter in comparison with the Dispersed Seitz set makes the Dispersed Kala Bhavan set the better basis for drawing conclusions about the copying process. I will touch briefly upon the relationship between the copy sets and will end by presenting other illustrated Malwa manuscripts that offer comparable instances of copying.

I am making an assumption here that the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* was the model for the two copy sets and there was no earlier illustrated version of the Latter Half of the Tenth Book on which all three were based. The existence of such a manuscript cannot be conclusively disproved and there is no evidence that establishes the exact relationship between the Kanoria set and its so-called copies. But working with the manuscripts that are extant, I am treating the Kanoria set

as the model where the images follow the text more closely than in the two copy sets, assuming that the copy sets with their narrative inconsistencies must have copied it, or another very similar manuscript.

Attitudes to Copying

Modern biases often direct us to ignore works of art that are copies, leaving us with only a partial view of the historical factors that motivated art production and dissemination. “One thing only seems to hold fairly constant in the vanguardist discourse and that is the theme of originality.”⁴ In her ground-breaking article that questions the “modernist myth” of originality in avant-garde practice, Rosalind Krauss argues that avant-garde artists and art historians have repressed and discredited the complementary discourse of copying, replication and repetition⁵ while valorizing a “culture of originals”⁶ and the notion of singular artistic genius. The artist is regarded as the origin of creativity, the source of invention, uncontaminated by tradition⁷ and unencumbered by yesterday. Running through this is the notion that (s)he must should create something new and unique and avoid copying what has gone before as the past is something to be rejected.

The modernist vilification of the copy is not a ubiquitous idea in global art history; artistic originality and copying have been understood differently across cultures and periods. Alongside Krauss, art historians have begun to question the “originality myth” which has resulted in a re-evaluation of copies and a revision of scholarship. This has greatly benefitted the study of objects such as Roman sculptures, which are no longer regarded as mere copies of

⁴ Rosalind Krauss, ‘The Originality of the Avante-Garde’ in *The Originality of the Avante-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1985, pp.151-170, p.157.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.162.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.156.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.157.

Greek works and a means to recover the original, but as “legitimate expressions of Roman cultural concerns.”⁸ Scholars have shown that Roman sculptures were not necessarily exact copies of Greek originals.⁹ Moreover “in many cases the prototype may not have been Greek at all but rather Roman.”¹⁰ Copies were not commissioned with the sole intent of owning a renowned work of Greek sculpture, albeit in bastardized form, but rather for the purpose of producing “recognizable” sculptures to decorate Roman public buildings.¹¹ Most public buildings were ornamented with sculptures that were meaningful according to the specific location in which they were placed. Hence designers would “rely on a handful of works whose meaning was instantly clear to everyone”¹² known as replica series¹³ which were needed in large numbers and produced in multiples.

The notion of what constitutes an original work of art has also changed over time. Greek and Roman sculptures were copied in the eighteenth century to satisfy collectors in England and Rome, to whom “it seemed to make no difference whether a collection of “antiquities” was truly ancient or whether it consisted of a mixture of genuine Greek and Roman sculpture, plaster casts,

⁸ Elaine K. Gazda, ‘Introduction: Beyond Copying: Artistic Originality and Tradition’ in Elaine K. Gazda, ed., *The Ancient Art of Emulation: Studies in Artistic Originality and Tradition from the Present to Classical Antiquity*, Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2002, pp.1-24, p.1.

⁹ For example, Ellen E. Perry refers to literary and rhetorical sources to show that the Romans were concerned with appropriateness over and above innovation, and rather than mechanical imitation, they approved of “creative emulation”, ‘Rhetoric, Literary Criticism, and the Roman Aesthetics of Artistic Imitation’ in *The Ancient Art of Emulation*, pp.153-171.

¹⁰ Elaine K. Gazda, ‘Roman Sculpture and the Ethos of Emulation: Reconsidering Repetition’, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 97, Greece in Rome: Influence, Integration, Resistance, (1995), pp. 121-156, p.133.

¹¹ For a discussion see Miranda Marvin, ‘Copying in Roman Sculpture: The Replica Series’ in *Retaining the Original: Multiple Originals, Copies, and Reproductions*, Studies in the History of Art Series, Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1989, pp.29-45.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.34.

¹³ In ‘Coping in Roman Sculpture’ Marvin mentions that such multiples were called ‘replica series’ and though the works might be different in scale, quality, material, they derive from a common type.

heavily restored ancient fragments, or even outright forgeries”.¹⁴ The main criterion was that the sculpture should look ancient, and discerning collectors were concerned with the quality of the copy, cast or fragment, not its date of production. Requests from patrons were also responsible for production of copies of the paintings of Guido Reni (1575-1642) for example, who did not object to another artist copying his *The Abduction of Helen* and even offered to retouch and finish the work, thereby making it “by his own hand.”¹⁵

David Roxburgh discusses copying as a method of learning and instruction among calligraphers in his examination of Timurid (1370-1507) albums.¹⁶ “Visual study of good specimens had always played an important role in calligraphic training”¹⁷ he says, and novices prided themselves on their ability to imitate the *belles lettres* of past masters. A similar respect is afforded to models in medieval European art, where a fourteenth-century treatise of instruction by Cennino Cennini “tells the aspiring artist that he must first learn to copy his master’s style before he can hope to add anything of his own”.¹⁸ While on the surface the two cases are different, with the Persian example advocating replicating the master’s creation and the European an ability to render the style, they are similar in their belief in the importance of copying to the process of becoming an artist. Tradition is not toxic and the past has a significant role to play in the present.

¹⁴ Nancy H. Ramage, ‘Restorer and Collector: Notes on Eighteenth-Century Recreations of Roman Statues’ in *The Ancient Art of Emulation*, pp.61-77, p.62.

¹⁵ Richard E. Spear, “‘Di Sua Mano’” in *The Ancient Art of Emulation*, pp.79-98. Spear discusses how according to Reni, an original was “any work that he designed and approved of” (p.80) and therefore re-touching was one step better as it would actually, literally, be touched by the artist.

¹⁶ David Roxburgh, *The Persian Album, 1400-1600: From Dispersal to Collection*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.24.

¹⁸ Cited in Jonathan J. G. Alexander, ‘Facsimiles, Copies, and Variations: The Relationship to the Model in Medieval and Renaissance European Illuminated Manuscripts’ in *Retaining the Original*, pp. 61-72, p.61.

The finest works of famous Persian calligraphers were the standard against which future Timurid works measured themselves “gauging achievement in the present through past models”.¹⁹ Thus copying was often pervaded by a spirit of competition and of besting contemporaries by successfully emulating the past. A Timurid painter did not think twice about “plagiarizing” compositions from earlier manuscripts, even for the most exalted royal patrons. In fact he practiced repetition “to show not only that he had followed tradition and respected his predecessors, but that he also merited comparison with earlier masters and that his skill was not inferior to them.”²⁰ Copying was a means of showcasing talent and demonstrating the worthiness of the artist as the inheritor of a glorious tradition. Past works constituted the canon and could not be ignored or set aside.

This brief discussion demonstrates that copying has been an acceptable form of artistic practice throughout history and across cultures, and the study of copies as significant artworks is necessary for a fuller understanding of workshop systems, circulation of objects and patronage and collecting practices. Works that look similar are similar only in appearance; they have distinctive individual stories to tell and should not be considered interchangeable or uninteresting. Each copy has its place in the history of art as I hope to demonstrate with my discussion of illustrated *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* manuscripts.

¹⁹ Roxburgh, *The Persian Album*, p.58.

²⁰ A. Adamova, ‘Repetition of Compositions in Manuscripts: The *Khamṣa* of Nizami in Leningrad’ in Lisa Golombek and Maria Subtelny, eds., *Timurid Art and Culture: Iran and Central Asia in the Fifteenth Century*, Studies in Islamic Art and Architecture, Supplements to Muqarnas Volume VI, Leiden, New York and Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1992, pp.67-75, pp.73-74.

Categorizing Copies

Artists copied on many levels. They copied compositions, in whole and in part, iconographic elements, the style of sources, or styles of rendering individual objects like skies, mountains, distances or towns on the horizon.²¹

There are myriad examples of copying among Indian paintings and illustrated manuscripts which have only recently become the subject of critical examination. Work has been done in identifying the source illustrations that were emulated²² and bringing together a body of paintings that can be called copies.²³ But these studies do not delve further to consider the motivation behind copying, the relationship between model and copy, the significance of what is retained and what is changed or the strategies used for making copies. One scholar has referred to images that recur in Jain manuscripts as “clichés” that repeat motifs and compositions.²⁴ He allows for individual artistic variation within the confines of tradition but reflects an inherent bias against works that are not original. What he does not take into account, as Rick Asher points out, is the issue of visual legibility²⁵ or being able to recognize a story when looking at it without referring to the text.²⁶ Images were repeated over and over again so that they began to function as signs that could be “read” like words.

²¹ Molly Emma Aitken, *The Practiced Eye: Styles and Allusion in Mewar Painting*, PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2000, p.127.

²² Milo C. Beach, ‘The Gulshan Album and its European Sources’, *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts*, Vol. 63, No. 332 (1965), pp. 63-91.

²³ W. Norman Brown, *A Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue of Miniature Paintings of the Jaina Kalpasutra as Executed in the Early Western Indian Style*, Oriental Studies No.2, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Freer Gallery of Art, 1934.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.1.

²⁵ Used slightly differently from how I use it—Asher means images that are similar beyond just their page composition and the specific subject matter rather than the general content would be recognizable.

²⁶ Frederick Asher, ‘The Varaha Temple at Deogarh and Attitudes toward Copies’, paper presented at the American Council of South Asian Art (ACSAA) Symposium, San Francisco, 2-3 March 2007.

Vishakha Desai's is one of the few attempts to classify copies in the context of Indian illustrated manuscripts based on attitudes to the past.²⁷ Her first type refers to copies that repeat archetypal compositions with slight variations over generations, constituting a linked series that connects past and present, while the second denotes instances of a distinct break between the production of the model and the copy, where there is a deliberate emulation of the past rather than the continuous propagation of a visual tradition. This is, however, a categorization that characterizes a copy manuscript as one historical document with a single uniform goal and does not consider its status as a creative work of art where each illustration showcases artistic deliberation and skill. It is impossible to assume that in copying the 116 pages of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* a consistent level of emulation and variation would have been maintained throughout, and a brief look at the paintings will only confirm this suspicion.

The visual parallels between a pair of paintings that depict a circular walled city being surrounded by an army (Plates 3.3 and 3.4) reveal a particular relationship between model and copy which is very different from that between two paintings representing Krishna accompanied by Satyabhama, riding Garuda and fighting Narakasura's army (Plates 1.41 and 3.5). For the first pair, even though not identical, the copy emulates its model's color scheme, composition, spatial arrangements and relation between figures much more closely than the second where distribution of space, page divisions, the palette as well as interactions between figures looks very unlike the model. In the second comparison, the copy consists of two equal horizontal registers, whereas the page in the model is broken up into three areas distinguished by background color generating a very different effect. The two pairs evince different attitudes of copies towards models, or possibly, two distinct types of copying.

²⁷ Vishakha N. Desai, 'Reflections of the Past in the Present: Copying Processes in Indian Painting' in Catherine B. Asher and Thomas R. Maetcalfe, eds., *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*, New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies, New Delhi, Swadharma Swarajya Sangha, Madras, and Oxford & IBH Pub. Co., 1994, pp.135-147.

“Copy” is an all-purpose term used loosely to describe everything from identical facsimiles to rough simulations that result from myriad processes of copying and needs further refinement in order for us to understand and distinguish between separate cases. An artist copying a motif from a model-book of drawings existing in the workshop or with the help of a pouncing is very different from the approximate visual copying of an entire composition rendered at a separate location. The motivation, processes and end results of copying can be quite dissimilar and must be described using a more specific terminology that I will attempt to generate.

A useful starting point is Molly Emma Aitken’s definition of “response painting” as “every kind of painting made after other paintings, from outright copying to reworked forms.”²⁸ In a way, every painting is a response as no work is created in a vacuum and borrows from the past in one form or another. She is, however, discussing paintings that specifically refer to one or more source images, and even if they are not identical, the relation to the earlier painting would have been recognized by connoisseurs. I posit that “copy” is one category of response paintings, and while all copies are a kind of response to earlier images, not all responses entail copying. Thus, when Mughal painters allude to older works by “citing” the “knoll-and-stream” motif in paintings of Layla and Majnun and the “motif takes a different form and suggests a different meaning”²⁹ each time, such allusive paintings are responses but not copies, even if a feature of the earlier painting is copied or repeated. Copying, in the way I will use it here, implies a degree of obvious, purposeful and overall look-alikeness that not all response paintings possess.

²⁸ Molly Emma Aitken, *The Intelligence of Tradition in Rajput Court Painting*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010, p.174.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.168. Aitken devotes an entire chapter to allusion and provides remarkable insights on the thought and skill that went into response paintings in 17th-19th century North India.

Aitken's work is extremely important in thinking about the deliberate choices made by artists even as they adhere to tradition or cite other works.³⁰ While I also explicate artistic agency, I am moving in a slightly different direction in thinking about the copying of entire narrative manuscripts.

We should keep in mind that copying is distinct from iconographic similarity, where works repeat a selection of standardized elements that must always be present. Almost all images of the musical mode 'Todi *rāginī*' will depict a woman outdoors, carrying a plucked string instrument, in the company of one or a group of deer. These basic constituents are inevitably present in all depictions of this subject, but not all of them are copies of each other because alongside iconography the copy must also imitate the compositional formulae of the earlier work.³¹ A visual debt to the model must be apparent over and above iconography for a work to be classified as a copy.

In thinking about terminology to refine the generic "copy" I turn to the work of Jonathan Alexander who presents us with the terms reproduction, replica and facsimile while discussing copying in the context of medieval European manuscript illumination.³² Alexander defines types of copies based on "intention to accuracy" as well as when they were made in relation to the original among other factors; my classification, however, will rely most heavily on the level of likeness or intention to accuracy. The use of "accuracy" is not a value judgment of how good or bad the copies are, but a way of gauging the copy artist's creativity: as the distance between model and copy grows larger, there is greater scope for discerning artistic agency. Also, the types

³⁰ Debra Diamond's work on citation must also be mentioned in this regard. See her *Politics and Aesthetics of Citation: Nath Painting in Jodhpur, 1803-1843*, PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2000.

³¹ A point made by Desai in 'Reflections of the Past in the Present.'

³² Alexander, 'Facsimiles, Copies, and Variations.'

I propose are only pertinent to those instances of copying where the aim was to mimic the entire image; a different taxonomic scheme would be required for partial copying of certain elements or motifs from a page rather than the whole illustration.

The classification I am proposing here is relevant to a broader study of copies and therefore, all the terms might not be used while discussing the sets that follow the Kanoria manuscript. Under the genus “copy” my first species is “facsimile” used in the same way as Alexander to suggest a work that is identical to its predecessor, or perhaps in the absence of mechanical reproduction, a work that strives to perfectly mimic without any purposeful deviation. A facsimile is practically indistinguishable from the original. Then comes “replica” followed by “reproduction” in descending degree of perfect emulation, again after Alexander, both of which intend to copy as accurately as possible. Only minor distinctions exist between model and copy. It is in these types that one might notice tiny variations arising naturally due to a different hand executing the copy, from misunderstanding the model, through the use of a slightly altered palette or by changing minute details. The copy of the work representing a city surrounded by armies mentioned earlier falls under the class of reproduction (Plate 3.4). To Alexander’s three categories I will add the categories of “imitation” and “version” where the former implies a lesser degree of accuracy than a reproduction and changes in the copy are intentional and made for specific reasons. Lastly, a work that is a version of another adheres only nominally to the model and can look significantly different even though its debt to the model in its entirety is obvious. I would call the copy image in the pair of paintings depicting Krishna on Garuda a version of its original (Plate 3.5).

Distinguishing between replica, reproduction and imitation is a question of degrees and there is no mathematical equation that can help us determine definitively which category is

applicable when. My method with the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and its copies is to study the level of copying throughout and make comparisons and assessments according to internal standards of accuracy, while keeping the broader meanings of the terms in mind. Thus while I cannot name any copy page a facsimile, calling one an imitation or a reproduction is based on how closely it follows its model within the scope of these particular manuscripts without referring to any external benchmark. It is a comparative categorization based on the evidence gathered from within the manuscripts.

One might wonder why these distinctions are significant, particularly since labeling a copy image imitation, reproduction or replica is non-scientific and arbitrary. To my mind it is a question of acknowledging the copy artist's agency in his varied "responses" to the images of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*. Copying illustrated manuscripts by hand allowed the artists to make choices about what to retain and what to change, and by examining versions, reproductions, imitations and replicas, we will be able to apprehend the copy artist's tactics, understand his motivations and identify gestures of creativity. Some scholars characterize copy manuscripts as inferior to the original, describing them as lacking in energy and soulless.³³ But my analysis will take a different approach.

In a riveting article that queries the pervasive naturalization of Islamic iconoclasm in medieval India, Barry Flood complicates the idea of an original artwork.³⁴ He discusses Indo-Ghurid mosques (late 12th century) that were constructed from re-used material, under the aegis of Muslim conquerors in North India, and asks us to view them as complete artworks. On the

³³ Eberhard Fischer and B. N. Goswamy, *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.64.

³⁴ Barry Flood, 'Refiguring Iconoclasm in the Early Indian Mosque', Anne McClanan and Jeff Johnson, eds., *Negating the Image: Case Studies in Iconoclasm*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005, pp.15-40.

walls of these mosques, anthropomorphic imagery was neutralized, effaced or completely removed in order to conform to the dictates of the Islamic orthodoxy. These transformations, however, are unevenly rendered within each mosque, suggesting that while the order was given by the patron, the artists exercised considerable freedom in how they performed their task. “...conceiving of iconoclastic transformation as a process of visual translation enables us to escape the bind into which we are placed by our tendency to privilege the originary work...as more authentic than any subsequent work created from its elements” and view the Indo-Ghurid mosque as “a new work with its own distinctive aesthetic.”³⁵ I suggest that we view the copies of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* from a similar perspective of not being subservient to their model, and recognize the creativity of the copy artists in the visual translations they orchestrate.

Copying Strategies

A major codicological difference between the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and both copy sets is the placement of corresponding text with respect to the image, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter referring to Plates 3.1 and 3.2. In the Kanoria manuscript, the corresponding text is inscribed on the reverse of the image while in the copy sets, the text appears behind the next painting. In fact, the first painting from the Dispersed Kala Bhavan set occurs on a page with no text on the reverse. This change in planning or layout may have helped to expedite the production process by allowing the copying of text and image to start concurrently. If there had been text behind the first image, writing and painting on one page could not take place at the same time and either text or image would have to be copied first. Not having the corresponding text on the reverse of the image transforms the viewer’s interaction with the manuscript as well,

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.29.

providing him or her with the possibility of placing image and corresponding text side by side³⁶ and looking and reading at the same time. It also facilitates “performance” where the patron could gaze at the images, following the narrative as the text was read out by someone else.³⁷

Because of the lack of extant physical evidence, we can only make educated guesses about the actual process by which entire compositions were copied from the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* to the copy sets. The copy sets resemble the Kanoria set closely enough to suggest that either the manuscript itself or detailed drawings of all the pages served as models for emulation. Milo Beach has shown how *Rāgamālā* paintings (imaginative depictions of musical modes) made in Chunar in 1591 formed the basis for the illustrations of the ca. 1680 *Rāgamālā* from Bundi, a Rajput kingdom far to the west of Chunar. He brings together two finished works depicting ‘Kamod *rāginī*’ as well as two intermediary drawings from ca. 1600 and ca. 1660 thereby establishing the possible chain of transfer from first finished work, through two middle stages, to finished work almost one century later.³⁸ Artists might not have access to finished works once they were presented to the patron, but detailed preparatory sketches and drawings often served the purpose if copies were produced within the same workshop.³⁹ In the case of copies produced

³⁶ Or with one above and the other below.

³⁷ Paintings were generally stored and viewed in unbound stacks according to Joan Cummins in *Indian Painting: From Cave Temples to the Colonial Period*, Boston: MFA Publications and New York: D. A. P., 2006, p.118. This would make it possible for two people to handle two separate leaves, which would not be easy in the codex format.

³⁸ Milo C. Beach, *Mughal and Rajput Painting*, The New Cambridge History of India, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp.161-2.

³⁹ David Roxburgh discusses the workshop practice of using such drawings as models for later images through the processes of tracing and pouncing, in the context of fifteenth century Persian manuscripts in ‘Persian Drawing, ca.1400-1450: Materials and Creative Procedures’, *Muqarnas*, Vol.19 (2002), pp.44-77. B. N. Goswamy mentions how painters would leave detailed preparatory sketches or master drawings to their families which became the basis for future renditions of the same subjects in *Pahari Masters*. See particularly the chapters on the Guler painters, pp.211-366.

at a remote location, such as the Bundi *Rāgamālā* sets after the Chunar one, either the manuscript itself or drawings would have to be transported to serve as the model.⁴⁰

Drawings can be transferred onto the fresh page through tracing and pouncing, or by copying using eye and hand. Pouncing cannot have been the method employed if there is a discrepancy between the size of the drawing and the finished product⁴¹ and given that the illustrations of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and the copy sets are differently proportioned (the latter's sheets being narrower by 5cm and longer by 2cm approximately), it seems to follow that either the drawings were made with slightly different proportions and then pouncing was carried out, or more likely, the copying, either from drawings or from the manuscript, was done non-mechanically using visual estimation. The one thing that seems obvious, however, is that while the artists of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* based their illustrations on the text inscribed on the paintings and were familiar with the story, maybe with the assistance of a middle man, the artists of the copy sets relied on the illustrations themselves without referring to the text for the most part. What we are dealing with are two distinct types of artistic practice, each with their own method and outcome.

Preparatory and intermediate drawings sometimes signal the colors that should be used in the copy paintings. The mid seventeenth-century drawings of the musical modes which probably served as guides for the ca.1680 Bundi *Rāgamālā* have dabs and dashes of paint to instruct the artist on what color to use for which element in the image. Plates 3.6 and 3.7 show how the colors indicated in the drawing closely follow the 1591 Chunar set's finished work and Plate 3.8

⁴⁰ The connection between Chunar and Bundi is a political one: the ruler of Bundi was the Mughal representative in Chunar before returning to his own kingdom, which was also under Mughal overlordship. It is not clear from Beach's comparison of the four 'Kamod *rāginī*' images whether the ca.1600 intermediate drawing was in fact a preparatory drawing for the 1591 set, or if a new drawing was made after the manuscript was completed and then taken to Bundi to be copied.

⁴¹ The mechanics of pouncing are discussed by David Roxburgh in 'Persian Drawing, ca.1400-1450.'

is a later product of the same sequence of transmission. There is no way of knowing if the artists copying the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* had access to drawings specifying the colors to be used or to the finished manuscript, but it seems they could exercise personal choice in executing the color scheme and create a different effect. The change is particularly noticeable in background colors that are invariably different between model and copy, and in the copy set's abstention from using the dark blue favored by the Kanoria artists. Neither of these variations is a commandment for the copy artists, but the disdain for blue and often brown, and the occasional preference for yellow in backgrounds is marked. Also, the backgrounds of the paintings in the copy set are nearly always adorned with tiny grass-like tufts in gold. These sometimes dot the sky, leading me to consider the possibility of their overtly decorative rather than representational function. Such an overall pattern is only seen in the last few paintings of the Kanoria manuscript as I have mentioned in an earlier chapter.⁴² (Many of these variations can be seen comparing Plates 3.9 and 3.10.) That they are done in gold raises the question about economics and whether the patron of the copy set desired a "richer" manuscript that could function as a vehicle to convey the wealth of its owner.

Apart from the colors, the copy artists also alter costume and architecture which could be motivated by a desire to personalize and contemporize an image. According to Desai, a patron may require that "the period of the pictures should be reflected in the culturally significant elements of the pictures: facial features, clothing of the figures, and the details of the architectural interiors. The modernity of each set is clearly reflected in the changes made in the clothing, jewelry, and headdresses of the figures."⁴³ While the narrative meaning of images may

⁴² Perhaps the copy sets (or at least one) was made in the same workshop as the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and both were worked on by the same artist who had a penchant for the tufts.

⁴³ Desai, 'Reflections of the Past in the Present', p.143.

not always be altered by such changes, they do affect what the images signify in terms of the period and locale to which they belong. Purposeful changes in dress and turban are in evidence in Plates 3.11, 3.12 and 3.13: the two figures at the bottom left of the central brown section in the model wear transparent *jāmās* which become opaque in both copies, while their turbans lose their feathers. No such transformations occur between the two copy sets.

Maria Loh also directs our attention towards the patron or collector's motivations in commissioning copies with minor variations in sixteenth and seventeenth century Italy.⁴⁴ She characterizes works of art as "prestige fetishes" and as important constituents in the construction of group identity. Members of a social class often requested a work similar to those owned by others belonging to the same class, but not an identical copy. Rather, it had to be better than any previous versions and unique in its own way. Hence the "emulative desire was paradoxical...to be recognized as part of the group but simultaneously above it, a first among equals."⁴⁵ The question still remains whether illustrated *Bhāgavatas* functioned as objects of personal devotion, artworks, or stood somewhere in between, but maybe the paradoxical desire for similarity and variation can be explained by Loh's interpretation. Perhaps the patron of a copy set wanted to own a manuscript that was similar enough to the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* to be recognizable and serve as an indicator of his class standing, but at the same time be different, better, unique. The golden tufts of grass would be an ideal addition to enhance the copy set's status, while not disturbing the manuscript's narrative constituents. Even if manuscripts functioned as objects of devotion a patron might take pride in his commission and desire that it simultaneously act as a symbol of class prestige. This raises the question about the status of the two copy sets vis-à-vis

⁴⁴ Maria H. Loh, *Titian Remade: Repetition and the Transformation of Early Modern Italian Art*, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007, pp.33-37. In *Pahari Masters*, Goswamy mentions that it was common practice to produce copies of sets that were successful, but with minor changes in format.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.33.

each other, where no perceivable difference exists and neither is “superior” to the other. Were both copies produced for one patron who wanted to own one and gift one? Or was one copy set commissioned as an act of flattery where owning something identical (to the other copy set) was the intention?

Reproductions, Imitations, Versions

There are no facsimiles or replicas to be found in the copy images of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* as the copy artist inevitably changes the color scheme or adds golden tufts of grass to the background. Reproductions are also few because by changing the palette, the overall effect of the copy painting becomes very different from its model. Comparing Plates 3.3 and 3.4, where the copy artist uses brown instead of the model’s blue in only small sections, the copy can be qualified as a reproduction because the artist is trying to emulate the model closely, and even though the change is purposeful, the total impact of the copy is not exaggeratedly different. A similar relationship exists between a model and copy pair depicting two palaces, with Krishna and Balarama on the extreme right emerging out of one which is besieged by three demons (Plates 3.14 and 3.15). Despite the golden tufts of grass in the copy, I would call it a reproduction, because the balance of warm and cool colors, composition and placement of figures are very similar to the model.

Comparing the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* illustrations with their imitations and versions will reveal that the changes made by the copy artist can have an impact on the copy set’s ability to convey Krishna’s story “correctly.” Instead of writing off such instances as mistakes, however, I explicate the copy artist’s agency and discuss the particular creative strategies that inform his decisions. I have not identified any discrepancies between the textual and visual narratives in the copy images that I categorize as reproductions. I am not, however, suggesting that such

discrepancies do not exist in the reproductions because of the particular nature of its response to the model. As my first example will show, the mere presence or absence of a moustache can be significant.

My analysis of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and its copies has led me to identify three causes behind the narrative variations that occur between model and copy, with the possibility that more than one can exist in a single image. The first is oversight, where the artist might miss a small detail which nevertheless has an impact on the narrative. The second is discrepancies that arise due to changes motivated by design and aesthetic considerations: a copy artist might alter the palette, size of figures, or page divisions in order to achieve greater visual balance and harmony, for example, but these changes affect the story as well. And third are the copy artist's editorializing changes, where he actively seeks to make changes to what is depicted in order to edit its content or subject matter of. This may be motivated by the impulse to correct what he perceives as wrong, or to alter the meaning and produce a sort of re-telling of the story due to particular sectarian or social concerns, in some cases perhaps instigated by the patron of the manuscript.

One of the most popular stories from the Latter Half of the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is Krishna's abduction of the willing Rukmini and their marriage. Rukmini, the princess of Vidarbha, was promised in marriage to Shishupala by her brother Rukmi who was an enemy of Krishna. But Rukmini wanted Krishna for her spouse and wrote him a letter begging for his help. Krishna responded by reaching her in the nick of time and abducting her, earning the wrath and eternal enmity of Rukmi who pursued him seeking revenge. In the battle that followed, Krishna would have killed Rukmi if not for Rukmini's entreaties, and instead he gravely insulted Rukmi by shaving off his hair and moustache and tying him to his chariot.

In the depiction of Krishna and Rukmi's battle (Plates 3.16 and 3.17), the copy artist has switched the red background from the middle horizontal register on the right side of the page in the model to the top and bottom ones in the copy. As red draws the eye in more than cool greens and blues, there is a shift in visual emphasis away from the central band where the actual encounter between the protagonists takes place. I do not believe the artist is intentionally stressing a different narrative episode that he considers more important; rather it is a question of aesthetics, design and color distribution. The change in attention, along with the many tufts of grass and the spaced out placement of figures in the bottom register as compared with the model's overlapping sea of humans, makes this copy an imitation. Apart from a change in focus by interchanging the red backgrounds, another very minute but important detail must be marked. The right side of the page depicts the battle and in the middle register, Rukmi approaches Krishna's chariot on foot wielding a mace. This is in the red register with Rukmi dressed in brown in the model while in the copy the background is green and Rukmi wears a transparent robe with red pants. In the Kanoria image there is a trickle of blood on Rukmi's upper lip, indicating that his moustache has been sheared off. In the image from the Dispersed Kala Bhavan set, the trickle of blood is depicted as a moustache. One could say that the artist is depicting a different moment in the story when Rukmi's moustache is intact, but I perceive this as an instance of the copy artist mistaking a detail as a result of oversight.

Confusing a tiny trickle of blood on the upper lip for a moustache seems like a minor lapse that might not be caught even by someone well versed with the story. A more noticeable instance can be found in the model and copy depictions of the story of the Syamantaka gem. Illustration 23 in the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* portrays Satrajit in the top left corner obtaining the Syamantaka gem from the Sun-god. Below him his brother Prasena wears the gem around his

neck and rides away on his horse intending to hunt (Plate 3.18). Directly under in the lowest register, Prasena is killed by a lion, which is in turn killed by a bear, who gives the gem as a plaything to his daughter. In the image from the Dispersed Kala Bhavan set (Plate 3.19) instead of Prasena on his horse being killed by a lion in bottom left corner, the artist portrays Prasena on his horse injuring the lion. The plot cannot move forward unless Prasena is killed by the lion, which leads to the search for Prasena and ultimately to the encounter between Krishna and the bear. Again, it could be that it was the artist's intention to show a different moment in the tale but why would he attempt this in one or two places and otherwise follow the model? I believe that rather than being concerned with narrative, the artist simply painted a familiar snapshot from innumerable hunting scenes of a warrior killing a predator.⁴⁶ Maybe he did not perceive that in the model it was the warrior that was bested, or perhaps he thought that his depiction was more appropriate where man triumphs over beast.

The copy image here is an imitation rather than a reproduction because the alteration in placement of warm and cool background colors changes the way the eye travels over the image. Also, the model image is divided vertically into two halves by architectural columns in the top two registers and a rocky cave entrance in the lowest. The copy image, on the other hand, seems to be made up of three horizontal registers with three compartments each and no central vertical divider.

Narrative slippages are perhaps most conspicuous in a pair of paintings that depict the story of King Mucukunda (Plates 1.40 and 3.20). One can discern the obvious parallels in terms of arrangement of figures, their actions and gestures and the central "landscape" element of a mountain cave. However, the Kanoria painting's use of dark blue, the absence of the horizontal

⁴⁶ Innumerable finished paintings and pounces of hunting scenes are available from the seventeenth century. See Brooklyn Museum 36.844 and Ashmolean Museum LI118.75.

dividing line and the more crowded composition strikes a different note than the copy painting's almost equal distribution of red and green, its two register format and spaced out placement of the now smaller figures. The copy painting is undoubtedly based on the model, but I consider it a version because it looks significantly different.

The story depicted here is from Chapter 51 of the Latter Half, the destruction of Kalayavana by Muchukunda, whose plot I have already outlined in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. The main events are Krishna leading his enemy Kalayavana into a cave where the latter kicks awake a sleeping figure that he takes to be Krishna. But this is Muchukunda who burns Kalayavana to death with his lethal gaze as soon as he opens his eyes. Muchukunda then exalts Krishna and when he emerges from the cave, he realizes that he is much larger than the other humans. He deduces that Kaliyuga or the age of darkness has begun, a time when humans are smaller in stature than earlier ages. On the right in both model and copy images communicating this tale, Krishna is chased by Kalayavana into a mountain cave. Within the cave Krishna hides in a red compartment and watches the scene unfold. Near the center bottom is the sleeping Muchukunda who awakens and directs his deadly stare at the three-quarter profile, turbaned and striding figure of Kalayavana. The latter is incinerated and depicted as a fiery ball, white in the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* painting and blue in the Dispersed Kala Bhavan Latter Half one. In the middle of the page Muchukunda folds his hands before the four-armed Krishna and emerges from the cave on the left where he encounters four humans.

There is a correspondence between the two images in general format, but certain variations must be marked. An important one is the depiction of Kalayavana kicking Muchukunda awake, as a result of which he is destroyed. In the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* image, the yellow turbaned, three-quarter profile Kalayavana's right foot stretches out to clearly kick the

sleeping Muchukunda. In the Dispersed Kala Bhavan illustration, however, Kalayavana is placed too far away from Muchukunda for his leg to reach the latter in a kick, despite his pose being similar in the two images. Hence the kick or the provocation is not depicted, but Kalayavana nevertheless suffers its consequences. It seems logical to conclude that the artist who painted the Kanoria set image based his illustration on a textual source and knew that Kalayavana must kick Muchukunda in order to get burned.⁴⁷ But the copy artist probably did not realize why Kalayavana's leg was shown touching (kicking) Muchukunda. He executed the figures in similar poses but placed them further apart, thereby excluding the important causal event.

It seems in this instance that the copy artist is motivated by a desire to create an uncrowded and symmetrical image where the humans are of equal size and evenly spread out throughout the page. The color is also distributed to balance the amounts of red and green in the image, and Krishna in the cave is off-set by the fiery blue Kalayavana. Roxburgh discusses the alterations made by the artist as intending to improve or fix the earlier composition while comparing a fifteenth-century Persian drawing of a Mongol warrior to its fourteenth-century prototype. "He makes numerous refinements to the prototype, not only in the contours of the figure's shape-how the warrior and horse come together to form a unit—but also in the relative positioning of limbs and in the manipulation of spatial intervals between design elements."⁴⁸ But attempts to improve on the model image in the case of the Latter Half manuscripts affect the copy image's narrative potential because uniform distribution is achieved at the cost of a critical occurrence.

⁴⁷ Or at least was instructed in his depiction by someone who knew the text.

⁴⁸ Roxburgh, 'Persian Drawing, ca.1400-1450', p.59.

When Muchukunda emerges from the cave, he appears taller than the people he meets because he is from an earlier age. The Kanoria *Bhāgavata*'s artist very clearly delineates him as almost twice the size of the four figures that approach him. The copy artist, however, does not maintain this distinction in size because he wants to make his figures more even. He "corrects" the model's disproportionate figures, but ends up with an image that does not reveal as much of the story.

A last point of variation between the two works is the copy artist's division of the page into two horizontal registers, where the model has a landscape for its backdrop. The use of a dividing line separates the upper and lower parts of the page and creates two discrete spaces for the action to unfold. Hence when we direct our attention in the copy painting to the left part of the page where Muchukunda emerges from the cave and encounters people, it would seem that the two men in the lower register are unrelated to what occurs in the top register, which is not the case. All four men encounter Muchukunda as he leaves the cave after his long sleep. The insertion of the division changes the spatial distribution and the relationship between the parts of the page.

In another painting the copy artist does not include the divisions made in the model and adds his own, producing a version with reduced story-telling capacity. The paintings represent Krishna's journey from Dwarka to meet the Pandava brothers and the affectionate embraces shared by them upon his arrival (Plates 1.18 and 3.21). In an earlier chapter I explored this painting to explicate the Kanoria artist's innovative use of background color. Of interest is precisely the same central vertical panel between the two palaces on either side of the page: the artist of the Kanoria set uses the blue background in this space to depict Krishna and his retinue on their journey, while in the red area Krishna is variously greeted by the five Pandavas after his

arrival. According to their respective ages Krishna touches the feet of two brothers older than him, embraces Arjuna who is of the same age, and receives obeisance from the youngest twins. The copy painting, however, converts the central space into three horizontal registers, doing away with the model's distinction between the journey and the destination and altering its separation of space and action. The model's innovative use of composition, page division and background color to convey distinct moments in the story is converted into a more regular arrangement without the same narrative impact. We encounter a similar preference for linearity comparing Plates 1.41 and 3.5, where the model's uneven compartmentalization is discarded in favor of two orderly horizontal registers.

Variation as a display of skill or stamp of individuality seems a possible explanation for the changes made by the artists who copied the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*.⁴⁹ Writing about fifteenth-century Persian manuscripts, A. Adamova concludes that the artist "sought to demonstrate his skill in repeating models with varying degrees of exactitude"⁵⁰ and the same could be said for the artists of the Dispersed Kala Bhavan and Seitz sets. Apart from colors, background decoration, architecture and costumes, we get a hint of the copy artists' aesthetic preferences in the imitations and versions already discussed.⁵¹ The same alterations, however, also affect the manner in which the copy manuscripts present the story and create discrepancies between the textual and visual narrative. Should we assume that the copy artist was unfamiliar with the story of the Latter Half of the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and therefore made "mistakes"

⁴⁹ We should keep in mind that if the copy artist was using drawings as his models, the variations may have already existed in them.

⁵⁰ Adamova, p.69.

⁵¹ Determining how many artists were involved in producing each copy set, and distinguishing between the strategies of each artist will be taken up in my book-length volume on copying. For now I am interested in showcasing how copying is also a creative process and analyzing the overall approach to copying the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*.

while copying, that he was unacquainted with the narrative conventions of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and therefore misunderstood the irregular page compositions? Was the artist able to read and understand the Brajbhasha text to know what he was illustrating? Or should we ask whether the artist intentionally rendered certain “discrepancies” so that the copies might convey a different meaning than the model?

Narrative Discrepancy or Editorializing?

John Seyller has explored the impact of an illuminated Mughal *Razmnāmā* on contemporary copies that were also produced in the imperial workshop.⁵² While the copies might borrow ideas from their imperial model, there is an “absence of visual quotations”⁵³ even when the same episode is portrayed. It seems the visuals in the copies were regulated by where the text starts and stops on a page, or by the particular arrangement of text within the manuscript, rather than an external model.⁵⁴ The point he is making is that differences in textual distribution and placement cause divergences between illustrations that depict the same basic subject matter. Comparing the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and its copies, it becomes evident that the text is identical between the three manuscripts. The few instances of missing out or changing a single letter on a page seem to be scribal errors that do not impact the narrative in any way.⁵⁵ The altered placement of the text, on the reverse of the next image in the copy sets, might modify the viewer’s interaction with the manuscript but again has no bearing on the content of the

⁵² John Seyller, ‘Model and Copy: The Illustration of Three “Razmnama” Manuscripts’, *Archives of Asian Art*, Vol.38 (1985), pp.37-66.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.40.

⁵⁴ In these manuscripts, the text is not found on the reverse but is incorporated into the illustration, usually in a box, and therefore has a direct visual impact. An illustration may contain more than one text box. Seyller discusses how images illustrate the moment just before (or in some cases after) the text breaks, and this varies in every manuscript. See his ‘Model and Copy.’

⁵⁵ Fewer leaves are available for textual comparison (than image) because paintings are often pasted onto other surfaces and removal would definitely damage them, making it impossible to look at the text on the reverse.

illustrations as it starts and stops at the same points in all. We can therefore conclude that the variations in the copies are not the result of textual differences of any sort, or of paintings picking up the tale at dissimilar moments.

In Mughal paintings, artists intentionally adjusted the positions of characters to communicate a change in status or importance of the person represented. Milo Beach brings together two Mughal *darbār* scenes that show Prince Khurram (the future Shah Jahan r.1628-1658) receiving homage from the Rajput ruler of Mewar.⁵⁶ This important victory over Mewar was won by the prince during the reign of his father Jahangir (r.1605-1627) and was illustrated for the chronicles of both rulers. The nearly identical compositions suggest that the painting that came later was based on the earlier one. Paintings of this genre are remarkably detailed and scholars have been able to identify specific courtiers through their portraits. It is one such courtier, Afzal Khan Allami, whose placement is altered between the earlier image made for Jahangir⁵⁷ and the later one which was executed for Shah Jahan after he became emperor.⁵⁸ In the former, Afzal Khan “stands inconspicuously among the men directly behind the Rajput” who bows in supplication to the Mughal prince, while in the latter, the artist “places him very prominently to the future emperor’s immediate left-the place where he regularly stood after his appointment as *Diwān* (Finance Minister) to Shah Jahan in 1629.”⁵⁹ In the depiction from Jahangir’s reign, Afzal Khan was just one among many courtiers, but when the exact moment is portrayed by an artist working for Shah Jahan, he occupies pride of place instead. Both

⁵⁶ Milo Cleveland Beach, ‘The Padshahnama and Mughal Historical Manuscripts’ in Milo Cleveland Beach and Ebba Koch, *King of the World: The Padshahnama: An Imperial Mughal Manuscript from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle*, London: Azimuth Editions, 1997.

⁵⁷ In the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

⁵⁸ In the Royal Library, Windsor Castle.

⁵⁹ Beach, ‘The Padshahnama’, p.122.

arrangements cannot be “accurate” or true to life because Afzal Khan could not be in two places at the same time. It is a choice made by the later artist to alter his position in the Shah Jahani painting and indicate Afzal Khan’s enhanced status. We should keep in mind that possibly neither painting places Afzal Khan where he actually stood on that particular day. Rather it is a symbolic display of the courtier’s high rank and influence through his proximity to the emperor.

Did the artist of the Dispersed Kala Bhavan set have in mind a similar shift in meaning when he changed the placement of Kalayavana (Plate 3.20)? I am certain that unlike the Mughal painting, moving Kalayavana away so that his foot does not touch the sleeping Muchukunda does not accomplish any transformation in the symbolic import of the work. I do not believe that the artist was attempting to showcase any change in status of the demon, or even depict an earlier moment in the story. It is a question of how the page looks, how figures should be arranged and how much space should be left in between them. In fact, the artist’s intention in many of the imitations and versions discussed earlier has a lot to do with design, balance and regularity in the copies, or aesthetic considerations. But do we also see evidence of editorializing, where the copy artist is motivated by the necessity of conveying a different meaning than the model?

We return to Plates 3.1 and 3.2 where the model image, in keeping with the textual narrative, depicts Krishna and Balarama running away from the battlefield chased by monstrous foes in the lower left blue section of the page. This is the episode that follows the destruction of Kalayavana when Krishna returns to his capital Mathura and kills the remainder of Kalayavana’s followers (top right corner), only to find the city surrounded by Jarasandha’s army for the eighteenth time (top left corner). The brothers’ flight seems an act of cowardice, though there is a larger divine plan behind it. The copy artist alters the story in Plate 3.2 and transforms the brothers’ apparent weakness into valor by giving Krishna and Balarama weapons which they use

to bludgeon a demon to death. This demon occupied the lower right corner of the model image and was the casualty of an earlier skirmish, his separation in space and time being indicated by the black background of the distinct compartment he was placed in. But in the copy image he is dragged into the same compartment as the brothers and made the bloody recipient of their blows. He is also provided with a sword and shield to complete the picture. The brothers do not appear craven because they are not depicted as fleeing, but engaged in warfare where they are victorious.

Editorializing is a strategy employed by artists across time and place, either of their own volition or due to the impetus of a patron. Discussing the varied visualizations of a single episode, Meyer Schapiro shows that “compulsion by the model is not so strong as to preclude individual revisions which are then maintained by a new common interest or viewpoint.”⁶⁰ Depictions of Moses raising his arms during the battle with the Amalekites to ensure Israel’s victory are tweaked according to the period and context in which they occur, and may depart from textual descriptions of him: with arms extended while being supported by two followers. Schapiro’s reading of a fifth-century mosaic is that it styles Moses after heroes in contemporary classic art as a self-assured statuesque figure who did not need his companions to support his arms. A Hebrew manuscript from the thirteenth century, on the other hand, saw “a prefigurement of the cross” in Moses’ pose of outstretched arms, and replaced this “repugnant symbolism” by joining his palms at the chest in a typical gesture of prayer with the two attendants holding his forearms.⁶¹ The artist was probably following the orders of the Jewish owner of the book to

⁶⁰ Meyer Schapiro, *Words and Pictures: On the Literal and Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text*, The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1973, p.23.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.27.

remove any allusions to Christianity. In both examples, artists edit with specific signification in mind; their portrayals are not variations merely as a result of oversight.

Perhaps the artist of the copy image that depicts Krishna and Balarama as fighting instead of abandoning the frontline is also actively transforming what the image conveys and purposefully deviating from the textual description of events.⁶² This may have been done at the behest of a patron for whom it was important to maintain a certain image of the divine brothers; and even though the artist follows the model for the most part, he inserts the weapons and moves the demon into the line of fire in order to meet these requirements. Or maybe the artist himself thought that such a depiction was more fitting, and being unaware of the greater purpose that prompted Krishna's apparent act of pusillanimity, considered the model image's portrayal as inappropriate. I have found internet chat rooms that discount any mention of this episode that paints Krishna as cowardly, denying its existence in the epics or mythological compendia.⁶³ Rather than oversight, is it possible that a seventeenth-century devotee who commissioned (or painted) the manuscript would have had a similar viewpoint to some modern day *bhaktas* and wanted to erase all traces of Krishna's seemingly unheroic deed?

The inclusion, omission or preference of certain episodes or the way they are characterized can sometimes be a clue to the patron's or artist's sectarian affiliations.⁶⁴ Each Krishna devotional sect emphasizes certain facets of his personality and is interested in evoking specific moods through their particular re-telling of his story. Can we discern similar predilections in the changes made by the copy artists? While Krishna as *raṇchod* (one who

⁶² It is a gesture similar to the one we encountered while examining the Mahananda Latter Half where, in describing Krishna's battle with Shalva, the Brajbhasha author leaves out Krishna's momentary delusion. But here the copy artist is unaware that the act of cowardice is not as it seems.

⁶³ For example, scroll down <http://in.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20091009110907AAZWH7s>.

⁶⁴ Like with the Jewish patron discussed above.

leaves the battlefield) is a beloved deity for the Pushtimarg sect, is it possible that another social group was opposed to any incident where Krishna was not the brave warrior? Thus what was absolutely satisfactory in the illustrations of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* was altered in the copies to suit the beliefs of a different type of patron?

Comparing the Copy Sets

The relationship between the copy pages themselves could be characterized as replication. They are of similar proportions and in some instances resemble each other almost to the point of indistinguishability. It is difficult to tell them apart without being a connoisseur of their individual styles. One way of determining which belongs to what set is by turning the page over and looking at the text—the Dispersed Seitz set has a yellow border drawn around the text creating a text box while the Dispersed Kala Bhavan text has no border, even though the content is identical. Minor differences exist between the illustrations as well, including an omitted detail in a Dispersed Kala Bhavan image.

In the trio of paintings depicting Krishna and Balarama's triumphant return from battle (Plates 3.11, 3.12 and 3.13), a terrific battle scene is presented in the right panel with the brothers on top fighting against Jarasandha. The text on the reverse says that as Balarama threw a noose around Jarasandha's neck with the intention of killing him, he was stopped by Krishna who wanted Jarasandha to return and attack Mathura again and again so that the hordes of evil-doers that would accompany him could be destroyed easily. In the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* image we will notice that Balarama clutches a thin, almost invisible noose that goes around neck of the three-quarter profile Jarasandha in his left hand as he lifts up his pestle in the other to kill the villain. Krishna in the meantime holds up his right hand to prevent this action. In the image from the Dispersed Kala Bhavan set we will perceive that the noose is missing from Balarama's hand

while Krishna's right hand carries a mace and is not held up to stop his brother from killing Jarasandha. In the image from the Dispersed Seitz set, the noose is present, and Krishna's mace is also present. Hence, while there are two variations in the Dispersed Kala Bhavan work, there is only one in the Dispersed Seitz image.

Is it possible to construct a visual stemma based on this comparison? Can we say that the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* was produced first, followed by the Dispersed Seitz set, and then in turn by the Dispersed Kala Bhavan set based on the number of variations? While the copy sets differ noticeably from the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* frequently in terms of colors, costumes, architecture and ornamentation and occasionally in placement of figures and page divisions, there are rarely any differences between them. For it to be the case that the Dispersed Kala Bhavan Latter Half came later, its artists would have to have access to very precise drawings and detailed instructions about every minute element of the illustration based on the Dispersed Seitz set rather than the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*. Or, both copy sets were produced in the workshop at approximately the same time, serially, the aim being rapid production rather than innovation,⁶⁵ in a manner akin to the replica series produced to decorate Roman buildings. Perhaps some details were missed in one and not in the other while copying.

In addition to the leaves that belong to the Dispersed Kala Bhavan Latter Half and the Dispersed Seitz Latter Half, I have found two paintings that are also copies made after the Kanoria manuscript, but in a completely different style and probably about a century later. Discussion and email correspondence with Molly Aitken led to the hypothesis that they were

⁶⁵ Replication of whole illuminated manuscripts in medieval Europe is discussed by Alexander in 'Facsimiles, Copies, and Variations', pp.68-9.

produced in the Mewar/Nathdvara⁶⁶ region in a non-courtly setting. This is extremely interesting because of the tangible Pushtimargi connection for both the model and its copy made over a hundred years later: the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* contains a salutation to Shrinathji while this late copy (Plate 3.22) is in the style of paintings produced by the atelier at Nathdvara. Instances like this provide important evidence of circulation of manuscripts and the social groups that were engaging with them during their history. Comparing Plate 3.22 with its purported model Plate 1.33, we will notice that the activities that Krishna and his spouse are engaged in are identical in every case, but the artist has not tried to mimic the style of the model. The text inscribed on this copy corresponds with the image on its reverse, just as it does in the Kanoria manuscript and unlike the arrangement of the Dispersed Kala Bhavan and Dispersed Seitz copy sets where the text behind a painting describes the action of the previous one in the set. Nothing else is known about these later copies and I hope that further research will unearth more works in the Nathdvara style that are based on the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*.

Copying Malwa Manuscripts

While researching the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and its copies, I have come across examples of copying between Tenth Book, First Half illustrations and I have named these manuscripts in the previous chapter. There are two First Halves that are the pairs of the Dispersed Kala Bhavan and Dispersed Seitz Latter Halves,⁶⁷ and the relationship between them is also similar to the Latter Halves: the images are replicas of each other with only minor differences and the text on the reverse of an image corresponds to the earlier work in the set. It seems that what we have are two

⁶⁶ Nathdvara is the center of the Pushtimarg sect from the last quarter of the seventeenth century onwards and home to a flourishing painting workshop. Mewar is the Rajput kingdom within which Nathdvara is located, even though the latter is an independent entity.

⁶⁷ Based on stylistic evaluation as well as comparing the way the text is written on the reverse.

complete Tenth Books of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, including both the First and Latter Half (either complete or not).⁶⁸ I am quite certain that the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* was indeed the model for the two Latter Half sets; was there a similar model for the two First Half sets? Or, were they created in order to accompany the two copy Latter Half sets and one will stand out as the model after further study? A relationship of copying exists between the National Museum First Half and the two First Half sets mentioned here, though I cannot yet determine if one was indeed the model. In the National Museum First Half the text on the reverse of an illustration matches it, unlike the previously mentioned two First Halfs and I am convinced that it was made in the same workshop as the Kanoria manuscript. But it contains narrative discrepancies between text and image not found in the other two, as I show below. This suggests that it is a copy. Perhaps there is a parent First Half, the 1686 one mentioned by Anand Krishna that will come to light in the future on which all these other First Halfs are based but for now, I am unsure of the exact relationship between the First Halfs I have examined, except to say that they are related through copying⁶⁹ and at least share a common ancestor.⁷⁰

I introduce images from two Tenth Book, First Half manuscripts to show that it is not only the lesser known Latter Half that was subject to misunderstanding,⁷¹ and that sometimes we must acknowledge that artists made choices that very adversely affected the narrative, whatever the motivations might have been. The question of course remains whether such illustrated *Bhāgavatas* were important for their story-telling function at all. I bring together depictions of

⁶⁸ I call the two First Halfs the Dispersed Seitz First Half and the Dispersed Kala Bhavan First Half.

⁶⁹ I am leaving out of this discussion the fourth First Half I mentioned in the previous chapter, which I called the Dispersed First Half, because I do not have enough paintings from it to draw any conclusions. But the two I have seen have me convinced that copying is also a factor here.

⁷⁰ I will explore these manuscripts in greater detail in my book project.

⁷¹ Daniel Ehnbohm (University of Virginia) posed this question after my paper at ACSAA 2011.

the deliverance of Sudarshana from the Dispersed Kala Bhavan First Half (Plate 3.23) and from the National Museum First Half (Plate 3.24) that appear to be two versions based on one model image. I have sketched the basic storyline in the previous chapter but the main points once again are: Sudarshana was a celestial being who had been cursed by some sages and turned into a python. He attacks and starts to swallow Krishna's father, Nanda, when he is sleeping on the banks of a river during a pilgrimage. Cowherds try to save Nanda by attacking the python with fire-brands but ultimately it is Krishna who comes to the rescue, liberating Sudarshana by a touch of his foot.

In the bottom two registers of both images we see Krishna, Balarama, their parents and other cowherds making their way to the banks of the Sarasvati and then taking a purifying dip in the sacred river in the right corner. The temple where they worship is depicted just above the river. It is in the top red register of both images that Sudarshana appears in his cursed form and at the center is Nanda's body half ingested by the python who is black in the Dispersed Kala Bhavan image and white in the National Museum one. In the Dispersed Kala Bhavan painting Krishna's foot is shown touching the python who, as a result of this divine touch, is released from his predicament and regains his true celestial form. The human Sudarshana folds his hands before Krishna to the left of the scene in which the python swallows Nanda. The sleeping figures as well as cowherds with fire-brands who try and help Nanda are also clearly represented. In the National Museum image, on the other hand, these last two smaller vignettes are eliminated, and in fact if we look closely, we will notice that Krishna seems to be using his discus to decapitate his foster-father! Instead of being rescued by his divine son, Nanda is attacked by not one but two Sudarshanas, Sudarshana also being the name of the discus wielded by Vishnu and his incarnation Krishna. I am certain that is not what the artist intended to depict; rather, he thought

that as usual Krishna is killing a demon, which is half man half serpent on this occasion.

Unaware of the story, however, he presents a complete misunderstanding of subject matter, which, unlike editing Krishna and Balarama's apparent cowardice, would be unacceptable under almost any circumstances.

It would appear that artists worked according to assumed general principles while making copies of illustrated *Bhāgavata* manuscripts. These were mainly visual—evenly plotted figures and standardly arranged registers, or narrative—Krishna must be shown in the pose of defeating a demon. Even when the copy artist fails to understand the logic of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* due to narrative inexpertise, his copying is not unthinking. Instead he is guided by specific aesthetic rules and/or a general familiarity with the story of Krishna. In the First Half, Krishna vanquishes numerous monstrous foes who appear in the guise of a variety of animals and birds, and one of the most popular stories is his defeat of the terrible snake Kaliya. Hence, the copy artist's assumption in Plate 3.24 that Krishna is killing a half man-half snake demon rather than granting him salvation, and perhaps his depiction in Plate 3.2 of Krishna killing a monstrous enemy rather than running away from the battlefield.

Apart from manuscripts that depict the story of Krishna, other mythological Malwa manuscripts produced in the last part of the seventeenth century were also copied.⁷² I have evidence of copying of the National Museum *Rāmāyaṇa*⁷³ as well as the National Museum *Durgāpāṭha* II,⁷⁴ which raises the possibility that copying was a common practice in the context of this group of manuscripts and not restricted to the narrative of a particular god. This is an area

⁷² An observation made in Joseph M. Dye, *The Arts of India: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*, London:Philip Wilson, 2001, p.311. Dye does not mention which manuscripts specifically were copied.

⁷³ A copy of Plate 1.26 exists in the Seitz Collection in Bonn. This is probably a complete *Rāmāyaṇa* copy set.

⁷⁴ Many paintings from this set are in the Kala Bhavan Museum, Varanasi. In this case I am not sure which set is the model and which the copy but further research will undoubtedly make this clear.

that requires much more research, and at this stage I can do no more than ask questions about workshop practice and suggest avenues of exploration. The first thing we need to do is establish whether the copy manuscripts were produced in the same workshop as their models and if all the copies are also the product of a single workshop. I am quite certain that the Dispersed Kala Bhavan First and Latter Halves and the Dispersed Seitz First and Latter Halves were all made in one place, and definitely by a different (perhaps later) group of artists than the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*. Is it the sort of situation we encounter with the Pahari styles where master drawings are used and re-used for popular subjects by many generations of artists from one family or in a single workshop?⁷⁵ It would be very useful to determine who owned the various Malwa manuscripts during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and if one ruler commissioned many copies of mythological manuscripts to distribute as gifts among either his relatives or subordinates. Or perhaps we are dealing with a non-traditional relationship between patron and workshop where the latter was not dependent on the favor of a single ruler/noble and produced manuscripts to meet the requirements of many? Maybe there is even a move away from royal patrons to manuscripts being owned by wealthy merchants and landlords?⁷⁶

We do know that during the seventeenth century, under the Mughal *manṣabdārī* system,⁷⁷ various Rajput rulers and nobles from different courts lived and traveled together along with their retinues.⁷⁸ This fostered a “transregional Rajput courtly culture”⁷⁹ with rulers adopting “a

⁷⁵ Goswamy, p.314.

⁷⁶ Suggested by Dye, *Arts of India*, p.311.

⁷⁷ The *manṣabdārī* system was the mainstay of Mughal administration and governance. It involved granting of land to officers and tributary Rajput princes by assigning them *manṣabs* (“ranks”—the higher the rank, the greater the land grant).

⁷⁸ Described in the context of one such court in Allison Busch, *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

type of royal behavior consistent with expectations for elite officers in the Mughal *manṣabdārī* system as typified by Man Singh Kachhwaha, Akbar's leading Rajput ally.⁸⁰ Rulers sponsored similar types of architectural projects (personal and public) and literary works⁸¹ and it is not far-fetched to assume that their interests in illustrated manuscripts would also be alike. In the eighteenth century, during the sunset of Mughal power, new kinds of networks were forged between Rajput rulers resulting in a continuation of the pan-Rajput association.⁸² Perhaps our copy manuscripts were produced in such circumstances where Rajputs interacted frequently, enjoyed a shared sensibility and often imitated the actions of a preferred member of their group. Therefore if one ruler owned a manuscript portraying the life of Krishna, others would be desirous of possessing it as well and would either turn to the workshop that had produced it, or find a way of obtaining a copy from the patron of the model.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to initiate a discussion about copying using illustrated Tenth Book manuscripts of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as our case study. These manuscripts do not present instances of artistic allusion where a painting contains quotations from famous works and engages the connoisseur in an intricate intellectual exercise of identification and recognition, thereby showcasing the talent of the artist as well as providing the viewer an opportunity for self-congratulation on the breadth of his own knowledge. The names of famous artists like Bihzad or Titian are not in evidence, whose works

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.46.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.47.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.173.

⁸² Such networks included religious ones forged through the adoption of the Pushtimarg among Rajputs, discussed in the next chapter and marital alliances. An example of the latter is the Rajput Alliance of 1708 between Mewar, Jaipur and Jodhpur. See Ramya Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Past in India c.1500-1900*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007, p.77.

the copyists might imitate to add their own name to a long illustrious line. Nor is it a question of producing a forgery where the intention is to deceive the viewer.

I would argue that producing or commissioning a copy was not an unusual occurrence in the early modern period and though artists were making copies, they were governed by unique canons, either personal or regulated by the atelier they worked for. We have the paradoxical situation of artists innovating while reproducing because while exact replication might be expected in the context of a devotional image, it was not required in a narrative environment. This is not to say that the illustrated *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* manuscripts were not objects of devotion, but the illustrations themselves did not function as icons that could not be altered because any change would detract from the icon's efficacy.

In an earlier chapter I analyzed how the artists of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* devised the illustrations in keeping with textual descriptions. Their actions are directed by the text and he adopts narrative strategies in order to portray it effectively and in great detail. The artists of the copies refer to a different source, the illustrations of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and seem to have little regard for the textual narrative. They are engaged in a very different type of artistic process. Despite the fact that we are dealing with copies, and the copy artists were bound by certain definite constraints—they had to refer to the model, they nevertheless manage to showcase their individuality. The changes in color and page division in the copy manuscripts are clearly the product of specific aesthetic preferences. Just as the varying degrees of neutralization, effacement and removal in a single mosque suggest that artists were given a free hand in how they chose to effect the required transformations,⁸³ the inconsistent levels of similarity throughout the copy manuscripts indicates that there were no exact rules about how much

⁸³ Cited earlier.

variation was allowed. And while the figures and their relative positions are repeated intact, the other elements are reproduced unevenly, signifying the personal preferences of each artist.

The liberty and space for experimentation allowed to the artists is partially responsible for the incongruities between visual and textual narrative in the copy sets. If the copies were facsimiles, perhaps small details would still be missed, but many of the other discrepancies would have been omitted. It seems that a facsimile was not the desired product and perhaps even narrative accuracy was not a major concern. A patron who viewed the manuscript as an artwork may not have been acquainted with the story, or was unconcerned with the discrepancies because story-telling was not the manuscript's primary purpose. If the illustrated *Bhāgavatas* functioned primarily as objects of personal devotion, it may have been sufficient to possess such a work, the owner not being overly troubled with its complete narrative accuracy.

4: CIRCUMVENTING THE MALWA PROBLEM

Introduction

The Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and other stylistically related manuscripts such as the National Museum First Half, *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Durgāpāṭhas*, as well as the copies, have been classified by scholars as Malwa style, based on the supposition that they were produced in the Malwa region of Central India over the course of the seventeenth century. Existing scholarship on Indian illustrated manuscripts pays very little attention to Malwa painting. Comprehensive surveys and exhibition catalogues rarely commit more than a few pages and sometimes only a paragraph to it,¹ usually making generalizations on the basis of a few illustrations. Individual volumes devoted to Malwa painting are just a handful² and a sustained investigation of any aspect of Malwa painting has not been undertaken since the 1980s. This is not due to a lack of extant manuscripts because examples of Malwa painting abound in museums and private collections worldwide, in most cases readily available for study. But for the most part they continue to languish, unexplored and ignored by scholars who prefer Mughal or Rajput pages. As the preceding discussion in this dissertation has shown, Malwa painting is not without interest—the vibrant and striking illustrations present many avenues of research. But the absence of a framing historical narrative, which includes information about patron and court of production, has greatly handicapped its case in a field that regards political history as a necessary tool in art history. In this chapter I discuss what I call the “Malwa problem” and suggest ways of circumventing it by

¹ For example Milo C. Beach, *Mughal and Rajput Painting*, The New Cambridge History of India, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

² W. G. Archer, *Central Indian Painting*, London: Faber and Faber, 1958, Anand Krishna, *Malwa Painting*, Benaras: Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1963, Joseph M. Dye, *The Chronology and Stylistic Development of Seventeenth Century Malwa Painting*, PhD dissertation, IFA, New York University, 1980, D. Khare and M. D. Khare, *Splendour of Malwa Paintings*, New Delhi: Cosmo, 1983 and Agarwal, Bhanu, *Valmiki Ramayana in Malwa Painting*, Varanasi: Ganga Kaveri Publishing House, 1995 are the only ones I know devoted solely to Malwa painting.

concentrating on the visual material on the one hand, which has been my goal in Chapters 1 and 3, and examining the larger socio-cultural context in which manuscripts like the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* would have been circulating, on the other.

The strategy I am proposing takes into account the salutation inscribed on the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* that associates it with the Pushtimarg sect. The late seventeenth century, when the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* was produced, was a time of great transformation for this Vaishnava sect. The main idol was moved to Rajasthan for protection against perceived religious persecution, which resulted in a change in the physical and spiritual center of the sect, as well as the induction of a class of princely members. I suggest that the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and its copies were commissioned under the aegis of such new Pushtimargis (members of the Pushtimarg sect).³ These devotees would have had an interest in displaying their devotion through meritorious acts such as patronizing manuscripts that celebrated the life of the principle deity of the sect. The more martial nature of the Latter Half of the Tenth Book probably appealed to one or a few such patrons, like a king or princes, for whom war and heroism were significant facets of life.

Such an approach moves the emphasis away from determining the specific patron or court of production of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*. Instead, social factors that impacted numerous possible patrons are laid out with the understanding that any person affected by them might have been responsible for the creation of the manuscript. This tactic is particularly useful in studying Malwa painting where names of patrons are rare.

The Malwa Problem

North Indian illustrated manuscripts are typically classified according to the political units or courts that patronized them. At the time when Babur first established Mughal rule in

³ While many Rajput rulers did not officially convert till the mid eighteenth century, they came into direct contact with the sect from the last quarter of the seventeenth century.

India in 1526, the north-western and central parts of the country were divided into many small kingdoms ruled by Rajputs. Scholars have disagreed about the existence of pre-Mughal painting among the Rajputs, but there is a general consensus that by the end of the sixteenth or early seventeenth century, when the imperial Mughal atelier was flourishing under Akbar, many Rajput kings also supported court workshops. The three broad categories of non-Mughal painting, divided according to geography are the Rajput schools (or styles) in modern day Rajasthan, Pahari schools in the Punjab hills and Central Indian schools adjoining Rajasthan's eastern border. "Rajput" is split further by kingdom into Mewar style, Bundi, Kota, Bikaner and more and then into its smaller political sub-units of *ṭhikānās*,⁴ and "Pahari" into Kangra, Guler, Basohli and so on. "Central India" is more complicated; the region consists of two large provinces—Malwa to the west and Bundelkhand to the east—each made up of smaller kingdoms. "Central Indian style," "Malwa style" and "Bundelkhand style" have been used interchangeably, with different scholars having personal preferences, to designate a group of stylistically related manuscripts including the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, believed to be produced in the region in the seventeenth century.⁵ The exact court(s) that patronized these manuscripts is yet to be conclusively determined and we cannot even be certain that they were all made in the same workshop. I have used the term "Malwa painting/style/school" in this dissertation while referring to the broad style but without committing to a definite or single location.

What emerges in much existing scholarship is the idea of "Mughal influence" in manuscript illustration—the political superiority of the Mughals over the Rajput kingdoms, many of which had submitted to tributary status by the seventeenth century, translates into the

⁴ Deogarh was a *ṭhikānā* of Mewar, for example.

⁵ Anand Krishna, *Malwa Painting*.

supremacy of their artistic production as well.⁶ The world of painting is seen to run parallel to that of politics so that Rajput kingdoms who acceded to Mughal overlordship display Mughal stylistic features in the manuscripts produced by the court-sponsored workshop, while opposition to Mughal rule was evinced by a traditional and conservative painting style.⁷ Hence, paintings from the Rajput state of Mewar that “resisted” the Mughals in politics and therefore art differ considerably from those at Bikaner, one of the first Rajput kingdoms to form an alliance with the Mughals, matched by their “absorption of Mughal influence” in painting. And Malwa paintings, which evince the least Mughal influence, rarely come under any scholarly scrutiny. Vishakha Desai has shown that such a generalized theory becomes untenable under the slightest inspection and that the real picture is more complex, requiring a nuanced understanding of the relationship of each specific court to the imperial Mughal center.⁸ Recently, Molly Emma Aitken has argued that in the mid to late seventeenth century, paintings attributed to a single court contain more or less Mughal elements depending on their subject matter.⁹ While portraits display a greater affinity with the Mughal style, narrative themes are traditional. It might not simply be a question of political alliance that determines a Rajput painting’s stylistic partiality to the Mughals. According to Aitken, ““influence” does not do justice to the complex negotiations that characterized the encounter”¹⁰ between Mughal and Rajput art.

⁶ Much of this material has been covered by Molly Emma Aitken in *The Intelligence of Tradition in Rajput Court Painting*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010. My discussion is nuanced by my particular interest in Malwa painting, which is something Aitken does not explore.

⁷ Discussed in some detail by Vishakha Desai in ‘Painting and Politics in Seventeenth-Century North India: Mewār, Bikāner, and the Mughal Court’, *Art Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 4, New Approaches to South Asian Art (Winter, 1990), pp. 370-378.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Aitken, *Intelligence of Tradition*, pp.24-26.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.24.

What I find surprising is scholarship's need to justify the fact that certain painting styles were not affected by the Mughal. For most scholars, the two main categories of Indian manuscript paintings have conventionally been Mughal and non-Mughal, with influence constantly flowing in one direction. And if a non-Mughal style does not evince the appropriate influence, an explanation has to be found for this anomaly. Political resistance manifest through a more traditional painting style is one way of accounting for the lack of Mughal influence. Another is to suggest that artists were not skilled enough to execute the superior Mughal idiom. A third, which is often used while discussing Malwa paintings, is geographical isolation. The introduction to a recent exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum said:

Contact with artists from the Mughal workshops influenced Rajput artistic production beginning in the early seventeenth century. However, the isolation of some Rajput courts, especially those in Malwa, allowed for a continuation of older painting styles. Mughal pictures emphasize the realistic portrayal of people and events and the accurate rendering of minute details. In contrast, the Rajputs rejected the depiction of everyday life and focused instead on boldly presenting archetypal forms, divine manifestations, and abstract ideals.¹¹

This is an almost verbatim reiteration of what was said in an exhibition catalogue for the same museum published in the 80s:

Malwa and Bundelkhand, for example, too remote to be much influenced by Mughal customs, remained closest to the bold drawings, simplified designs, and color schemes of the pre-Mughal style...¹²

For these scholars it is physical remoteness that accounts for the fact that Mughal painting did not influence the Malwa style and permitted the continuation of an earlier idiom. Such explanations fail to consider that Malwa was an important Mughal province throughout the seventeenth century (when the Malwa style was prevalent) and well-connected to the imperial

¹¹ *Lyrical Visions: Paintings from North India*, Metropolitan Museum, New York, December 2011-May 2012.

¹² Stuart Cary Welch, *India: Art and Culture, 1300-1900*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1985, p.335.

center by roads to the extent that it was certainly not “isolated.” Artistic choice is never regarded as a factor where a conscious decision might be made about how paintings should look.¹³ A non-artistic excuse is sought for style questions.

The observation about Malwa being unaffected by the Mughal style is an oft-repeated one:

The closest continuation of the pre-Mughal style appears in the boldly simplified designs and colour schemes used in the schools of Malwa and Bundelkhand...The primitive expressive power of this style is scarcely affected by the Popular Mughal influence...¹⁴

Scholarship seems to suggest that despite the availability of the (superior) Mughal idiom in India, surprisingly, here is a style that remains impervious. The underlying assumption is that it would be natural for all older, indigenous painting styles to be impacted by the newer, foreign Mughal one, no matter if or how the contact occurred. In comparison to Mughal painting, Malwa is characterized as “bold,” “simple,” “primitive” and “folkish.”¹⁵ And while the first two adjectives might be written off as referring to the features of the style, the others indicate that Malwa painting is regarded as a less developed art form. The tone of some scholars borders on disdain:

Indeed, the slight initial impact of Mughal aesthetic upon Rajput paintings of the early seventeenth century becomes clearly evident if we compare pictures from both Mewar and Malwa with contemporary Mughal paintings. Except for the costumes, there is little in these pictures to suggest even the slightest familiarity with the Mughal pictorial tradition. There is no attempt at suggesting perspective; the planes are established by bands of pure colours which show no effort at mixing or graduation; light is distributed uniformly over the surface; and the faces register no emotions but vacuously stare at each other with almond-shaped eyes...If the painter of these examples was aware of Mughal pictures, then we

¹³ Aitken argues convincingly for artistic choice affecting stylistic decisions in *The Intelligence of Tradition*.

¹⁴ Andrew Topsfield, *An Introduction to Indian Court Painting*, Victoria and Albert Introductions to the Decorative Arts Series, London: Stemmer House, 1984, p.32.

¹⁵ Joseph M. Dye, *The Arts of India: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*, London:Philip Wilson, 2001, p.312.

must conclude that his reluctance to introduce the more sophisticated achievements of Mughal aesthetic was due to the inherent conservatism of his own training or perhaps that of his patron.¹⁶

Adulation of the Mughal style is an inherent bias in much of Indian manuscript studies which in turn leads to Malwa not being appreciated on its own terms. But this is only part of the problem.

The basic premise of the classificatory system of Indian paintings—the use of political units as the guiding principle in categorizing styles—is fraught with difficulties as it leaves schools like Malwa out of the discussion. While in many cases style is closely connected with a particular court or political unit, the occasions when it is not must also receive due attention for a better understanding of how the “art world” functioned. As Daniel Ehn bom has pointed out, “geography is only part of the question, and the fullest interpretations of Hill painting are those that take into consideration the personal and family styles of related artists who moved throughout the Hill regions, spreading and absorbing influences as they moved... This is a classification system that requires careful re-examination, for a place of production does not necessarily define a school.”¹⁷ Artists were itinerant between the Pahari courts and carried with them their styles as well as the master drawings belonging to their family.¹⁸ Style is literally not confined to one particular court and two works evincing a similar style might be made at two separate courts or locations. Aitken has argued that artists at one court workshop were capable of executing other styles and there is method and meaning in the stylistic choices made by artists.¹⁹ Many styles could be found in one court workshop.

¹⁶ Pratapaditya Pal, *Court Paintings of India, 16th-19th Centuries*, New York: Navin Kumar, 1983, pp.76-77.

¹⁷ Daniel J. Ehn bom, *Indian Miniatures: The Ehrenfeld Collection*, New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1985, p.20.

¹⁸ B. N. Goswamy and Eberhard Fischer, *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.

¹⁹ Aitken, *Intelligence of Tradition*, pp.31-33, 48-49.

Moreover there is the question about styles that cannot be assigned to any specific court and are placeless. The “problem” with Malwa manuscripts is that their court (or courts) of production has never been conclusively determined (or if they were even made at a court) and they exist in a political vacuum. The initial Malwa attribution was based on two place names found in the colophons of two of the four dated manuscripts, Nasratgarh (in the 1652 *Amaru Śataka*) and Narsyangsahar (in the 1680 *Rāgamālā*), which Karl Khandalavala concluded were references to Narsinghgarh in the Malwa province.²⁰ During the seventeenth century, Malwa, like other parts of Mughal-controlled India, was very much a part of the *manṣabdārī* system²¹ and some of the land grants given to Rajput princes brought them to Malwa. It is not far-fetched to assume that a regional Rajput king in the Malwa province, like those in what is today Rajasthan, would be interested in and have the means to commission illustrated manuscripts. Narsinghgarh, however, is a kingdom that was founded in 1681, after the two manuscripts apparently bearing its name in their colophons were produced. Hence the Malwa attribution was never a secure one.

W. G. Archer preferred the term “Central Indian painting” for his discussion of manuscripts that purportedly came from the region comprising the provinces of Malwa and Bundelkhand.²² He broadly distinguishes between three separate Malwa types in the seventeenth century: the first includes the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, the second can be recognized by the presence of a floral or geometric scroll at the bottom of the page, and the third type which evinces influence from Deccani painting to the south but shares some features with the second. A more

²⁰ Karl Khandalavala, ‘Leaves from Rajasthan’, *Marg* 4, No.3 (Dipavali, 1950), pp.2-24, 49-56.

²¹ Rajendra Verma, *Madhya Pradesh District Gazetteer: Mandsaur*, Bhopal: Directorate of Gazetteers, Department of Culture, Govt. of Madhya Pradesh, 1993, p.33.

²² Archer, *Central Indian Painting*.

in depth study was carried out by Anand Krishna who, as I mentioned earlier, was the first scholar to posit a chronology of Malwa manuscripts.²³ This chronology helps delineate the contours of the Malwa style and trace its development over the seventeenth century after which he believes it peters out. It has since been refined by Joseph Dye.²⁴

Anand Krishna proposed the theory that these seventeenth-century Malwa manuscripts were actually produced in Bundelkhand, based on a number of factors. Many of the manuscripts bear the stamp from the Datia palace library. Datia is a kingdom within Bundelkhand and a distinct group of manuscripts produced from ca.1800 are attributed to it (Plate 1.12). But a modern day stamp of ownership on the manuscripts does not necessarily mean that the manuscript bearing it was produced in Datia and it could have been arrived there as a gift from another regional kingdom. There is enough evidence of gifting and circulation of manuscripts in the late seventeenth century between Rajput kings that would support such a hypothesis.²⁵ A second reason is that an illustrated *Rāmāyaṇa* (ca.1640) in the Malwa style gives the name of its patron as Hira Rani, whom Anand Krishna associates with Hirade, the wife of Pahar Singh of Orchha (r.1642-1660), another sub-state within Bundelkhand. This signifies that she was possibly the patron of that particular manuscript and perhaps a few other contemporary stylistically related ones, but not of all Malwa manuscripts produced throughout the seventeenth century. The scholar himself acknowledges his inability to come to a definite conclusion, leaving the puzzle of the attribution of the manuscripts unsolved.²⁶

²³ Anand Krishna, *Malwa Painting*.

²⁴ Dye, *Chronology*.

²⁵ See Molly Emma Aitken, 'Portraits, Gift-giving and the Rajput Alliance of 1708' in Naval Krishna and Manu Krishna, eds., *The Ananda-vana of Indian Art: Dr. Anand Krishna Felicitation Volume*, Varanasi: Indica, 2004, pp.355-366.

²⁶ Anand Krishna, *Malwa Painting*.

More recent scholarship, while acknowledging the existence of the Malwa problem, tends to leave it alone, occasionally proffering suggestions about possible attributions or making the case for an alternative framework:

Although the region of Malwa contained several Hindu states, the most important of which was Orcha, we do not know whether the paintings labelled as “Malwa” were done for any particular court. Indeed, this seems unlikely for while portraits of rulers and court pictures are known from most Rajasthani states mentioned above, no portraits to date have been identified as reflecting the Malwa manner.²⁷

And:

Without a definite provenance, it is difficult to determine who patronized Central Indian painting. Rajput families ruled the region and may well be responsible for some or all of these works, but only one royal inscription survives: the name “Hira Rani,” written on a page from an important *Ramayana* series at the Bharat Kala Bhavan in Varanasi. Moreover, the existence of multiple sets of nearly identical paintings illustrating a given theme suggests that at least some Central Indian paintings were mass-produced for commercial markets, rather than for royal patrons.²⁸

Two very important points come up for consideration: first, there are no known Malwa portraits, suggesting that there was no fixed patron (or line of patrons) who wanted themselves immortalized in the Malwa style. It does not preclude the possibility that two separate styles were practiced at a court, for example, one for illustrated manuscripts and the other for portraiture as mentioned earlier:

In some Rajasthani Rajput states only one style, and therefore probably a single large family (or studio), was employed by the local ruler; in other states several styles were employed, and perhaps as many families given patronage.²⁹

Second, the existence of multiple nearly identical paintings, what I call copy sets, implies mass production to meet market demand. Of course, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, a patron

²⁷ Pal, p.75.

²⁸ Dye, *Arts of India*, p.311.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.269.

may have commissioned copies of manuscripts from his atelier to give as gifts, or in the manner of the Pahari states, a family of artists or a workshop kept master drawings of high demand subjects that were recycled over generations. Suffice it to say, there are many likely scenarios in which Malwa paintings may have existed.

In the midst of all this uncertainty, a recent discovery by Pramod Chandra gives us a name which can be identified with a town in Bundelkhand.³⁰ He translates an inscription behind a painting from a *Rāgamālā* set in the B. K. Birla collection in Kolkata:

The entire series was finished on Sunday, the 4th day of the bright half of the month of *Chaitra*, in the *samvata* year 1744 by the artist Ramakisna [Ramakrishna] in the auspicious place of Lalitapura. May it be auspicious!³¹

The date corresponds to 1687 which fits in nicely with the existing Malwa painting chronology and Lalitapura refers to a populous town near the city of Jhansi in Bundelkhand proper.³² This clearly indicates that Bundelkhand is part of the Malwa painting picture, but not at the cost of the Malwa region itself. According to Chandra, a portrait of Ravata Hari Singh, a ruler of the Malwa state of Deolia/Partabgarh dated to 1648, also from the Birla collection, is definitely the work of a painter who was conversant with the Malwa manner. The inscription at the back states:

The picture was made and presented by the painter Didar Baksha to Hari Singh at Delhi in VS 1705/CE 1648. The occasion was the presentation of gifts by the emperor Shah Jahan to the *Ravata* at Delhi, including a robe of honour...after which he was dispatched with an army to Kanthala [Deolia/Partabgarh].³³

The portrait was done in Delhi but Chandra believes that the artist was from Central India and accompanied the ruler on his visit. It is also possible that a Mughal artist chose to render a

³⁰ Pramod Chandra, 'Notes on Malwa Painting' in Naval Krishna and Manu Krishna, eds., *The Ananda-vana of Indian Art: Dr. Anand Krishna Felicitation Volume*, Varanasi: Indica, 2004, pp.283-290.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.286.

³² And therefore close to Datia and Orchha.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.288.

Central Indian ruler in a style that was local to the region, but the association between a Malwa prince and the so-called Malwa style definitely existed for the artist. Chandra concludes that the style which is designated as Malwa was actually prevalent in both Malwa and Bundelkhand,³⁴ with the latter as the center. He therefore chooses to revert to “Central Indian painting” as a more accurate appellation.

How does this new information help us to understand Malwa painting? The most important thing to remember is that we now have three named places of production for Malwa paintings: Nasratgarh (1652), Narsyangsahar (1680) and Lalitapura (1687)³⁵ even if we are not yet sure what location two of them refer to. In my opinion, we might take this to mean one of two things: either, as Chandra maintains, this is a style that was practiced in more than one place/workshop with slight variations but an overall family resemblance. Ehnabom has made a similar suggestion about the Western Indian style that “it was not an isolated phenomenon restricted to a single center or small area”³⁶ but “widespread throughout many regions of India.”³⁷ The second possibility is that here is a group of artists who were itinerant, either travelling with a ruler during a Mughal campaign, for example, or moving autonomously looking for work.³⁸ The different place names on the manuscripts are the locations at which the artists stopped and worked, either for a patron or independently. Without further evidence it is

³⁴ Chandra also makes the argument that the style persisted beyond the seventeenth century.

³⁵ Or two if we agree with Khandalavala that Nasratgarh and Narsyangsahar both refer to Narsinghgarh.

³⁶ Daniel J. Ehnabom, *An Analysis and Reconstruction of the Dispersed Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1984, p.20.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.7.

³⁸ In *Intelligence of Tradition*, Aitken introduces documentary evidence that supports the idea of artists’ mobility between courts.

impossible to fix on one explanation, but I think it is safe to say that the Malwa style is not confined to a single location.

In that case, perhaps it would be productive to shift away from Anand Krishna's (and Dye's) chronology with its teleological approach that traces the growth, development and decline of a single "Malwa" style in the manner of the Rajput court styles. Anand Krishna himself distinguishes two distinct styles within Malwa painting after 1650, with one showing Mughal influence and the second retaining former "archaic" traditions. He also refers to a third idiom that combines elements from the two in the 1680s. Dye creates clusters of manuscripts around the known dated ones and sub-divides each cluster into sub-styles using detailed connoisseur-like analysis. Connections are made across time by referring to "parent styles" in an earlier cluster and their off-shoots from a later date. While chronology is still privileged, both scholars recognize the existence of sub-styles, suggesting that Malwa painting is not one homogenous group. Many workshops may have been part of the picture. Whether this means multiple court styles (or any for that matter) is uncertain, but perhaps a single chronological narrative is not an accurate presentation of the situation. Dye's clusters are very useful for thinking about the actual links between manuscripts and arriving at what might be multiple chronologies of different workshop styles, for example. Manuscripts that collect around a single dated one and were made around the same time provide the opportunity for studying workshop practices as I do briefly in an earlier chapter, and for distinguishing between their styles.

As Pramod Chandra has said:

...the adjudicating factor, I believe, must be the nature of the materials themselves and not the condition of political units that sometimes coincide, and sometimes do not, with well-defined cultural and linguistic regions.³⁹

³⁹ Pramod Chandra, 'Notes on the Study of Indian Miniatures' in Ehnobom, *Indian Miniatures*, p.17.

My approach so far in this dissertation has been to examine the visual evidence, as suggested by Chandra, and extract information about the division of labor within a workshop, strategies employed to illustrate myths and epics and artistic choices made even while copying. I will now paint a picture of the Vaishnava world in which, I believe, manuscripts like the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and its copies were circulating. This will serve as an alternative framework to the court-based taxonomic system that is the norm in Indian manuscript studies. I am not suggesting that the existing scheme has no utility, but rather than trying to forcibly fit the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* into it, an understanding of the broader context will provide a more appropriate backdrop for its study while we still try and discover where and for whom Malwa manuscripts were produced.

The Path of Grace: An Alternative Approach

Around the time that the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* was produced, Shrinathji, who is saluted in the manuscript's opening couplet, was becoming an important figure in Rajput religious life. Shrinathji is a form of Krishna worshipped by the followers of the Pushtimarg ("path of grace") sect established by Vallabhacharya in the late fifteenth century. The Pushtimarg is one of the many devotional sects that flourished in medieval North India advocating the path of *bhakti* ("devotion") or a direct and intimate connection with the chosen deity, and like almost all other Vaishnava sects, it established its locus in the Braj region around Mathura and Vrindavana where Krishna spent much of his childhood and adolescent years. The members of the sect believe that Krishna is the supreme deity (and not an incarnation of Vishnu) and the only one who is capable of imparting salvation to impure human beings. In order to partake of his grace one must be initiated into the sect through the *brahmasambandha* rite:

In taking the *Brahmasambandha* one gives himself, his possessions, and his actions completely up to Shrī Kṛṣṇa and he vows to dedicate all future actions and material belongings to Shrī Kṛṣṇa before enjoying them.⁴⁰

This is an important feature of the Pushtimarg that personal wealth and possessions do not need to be given up—they must first be dedicated to Krishna and then the devotee is allowed to use them for his or herself. Attaining salvation does not necessarily imply abjuring worldly attachments or living the life of an ascetic.

In India it has long been expected that persons who are seriously attempting to pass from the ignorance and error of the world to the truth and knowledge of the divine will sever all associations with the ordinary way of life and its pleasures and pains. The sexual relationship, even within marriage, is always one of the first casualties when the decision to obliterate all links with the worldly life is taken.⁴¹

Many Vaishnava sects, like the Chaitanyas in Vrindavana, expect their leaders to take vows of celibacy.⁴² But this is not the case with the Pushtimarg. In fact Vallabhacharya himself was married,⁴³ setting an example that was meant to be followed by the preceptors as well as laymen of the sect. “Among the householder’s responsibilities are the duties of procreation, performing sacrifices (especially to the ancestors), and living within the community. The last obligation, paradoxically for a devotional sect, valorizes social hierarchies based upon caste divisions.”⁴⁴ The duty of a member of the community is *sevā* or service to Krishna through singing his praises, listening to accounts of his life, and obtaining *darśana* of icons.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Richard Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1992, p.19.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.31.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.32.

⁴³ It is believed that he was ordered to marry by Krishna himself.

⁴⁴ Norbert Peabody, *Hindu Kingship and Polity in Precolonial India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.55.

⁴⁵ Barz, p.33.

The main icon of the Pushtimarg, Shrinathji, depicts the child Krishna lifting up Govardhana mountain in order to rescue his friends and family from the wrath of Indra which was expressed as a terrible storm and torrential rain. Krishna, the savior and protector of his people, manages to keep everyone safely sheltered under the mountain, thereby proving he is superior to Indra, the king of the gods. There is a miraculous story that connects the Shrinathji icon and Vallabhacharya, saying that the former emerged out of the top of Govardhana hill⁴⁶ at the same moment that the latter was born. There are nine major public images for the community, including Shrinathji, known as the *navanidhi* or “nine treasures” that were first assembled and displayed in an elaborate festival by Vallabhacharya’s son Vitthalnath in 1581.⁴⁷ They were distributed among his sons who became the new leaders of the sect. Every icon worshipped in the Pushtimarg is regarded as a *svarūpa* (“own form”) or a living, breathing embodiment of Krishna that has to be looked after accordingly, like a real person. Apart from the *navanidhi* that are public *svarūpas*, every member of the sect, after being initiated, is given a personal *svarūpa* that he or she must care for daily.

At the end of the sixteenth century, the Braj region was where most of the public *svarūpas* were located, and, due to a land grant from the Mughal emperor Akbar, the community enjoyed a degree of economic stability.⁴⁸ But changing political circumstances in the next

⁴⁶ The story goes that initially in 1410 an arm emerged from the hill and then in 1479, a face was revealed at the moment of Vallabhacharya’s birth. *Ibid.*, p.22.

⁴⁷ Woodman Taylor, *Visual Culture in Performative Practice: The Aesthetics, Politics and Poetics of Visuality in Liturgical Practices of the Vallabha Sampradāya Hindu Community at Kota*, PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1997, p.44. The date is 1588 according to Peabody, p.62.

⁴⁸ The sect was the recipient of eight Mughal land grants in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that granted tax free use of land that had been previously acquired, a share in local trade, grazing rights for cattle and the patronage of Mughal aristocracy. See Edwin Allen Richardson, *Mughal and Rajput Patronage of the Bhakti Sect of the Maharajas, the Vallabha Sampradaya, 1640-1760 A.D.*, PhD dissertation, University of Arizona, 1979, p.32.

century completely transformed the situation: the Jat Rebellion in the region⁴⁹ alongside the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's altered religious policy, his destruction of temples in the realm including those at Mathura from 1669-1670, and his 1670 order of iconoclasm made the community leaders fearful for their own safety.⁵⁰ It was decided that Shrinathji should migrate from Braj and head westwards "to Rajasthan and Gujarat where they were attracted to centers controlled by sympathetic Hindu Rajput rulers which also had populations from the community, particularly of successful merchants."⁵¹ In 1670, hidden in a bullock cart, Shrinathji left Braj and made his way to the Rajput heartland, where, after stopping in the kingdoms of Kota, Kishangarh and Jodhpur, he settled down in Nathdvara in Mewar in 1672 (Plate 4.1).⁵² And though much is made about the cart carrying Shrinathji getting stuck in the mud at Nathdvara as a sign from god to stop at that location, it is more likely that the ruler of Mewar offered the best terms of a village and its revenues as well as political autonomy to the sect that resulted in a cessation of peregrinations.⁵³ The eight other *svarūpas* also left Braj around the same time, and while some of them journeyed for several decades, by the early eighteenth century, all but one *svarūpa* had settled down in new homes, "having found the steady patronage and protection of the most

⁴⁹ Shandip Saha, 'The Movement of *Bhakti* along a North-West Axis: Tracing the History of the Puṣṭimārg between the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, 3 (2007), pp.299-318, p.304.

⁵⁰ Taylor, p.47.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp.47-48.

⁵² According to Saha the places the icon stopped in before reaching Nathdvara were Jaipur, Bundi and Bikaner. The exact places are less relevant for my study but what I take this to mean is that in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, many of the Rajput kingdoms had contact with the Pushtimarg sect.

⁵³ Taylor, p.48.

powerful Rajput kings of Rajasthan.”⁵⁴ And with the physical movement of the *svarūpas* into Rajasthan, the core of the Pushtimarg power and influence also shifted away from Braj.

I assume that Rajput rulers did not provide land, revenue and security to the Pushtimarg sect merely out of religious piety. The public *svarūpas* would undoubtedly attract devotees and become a thriving pilgrimage site that would add to the wealth and prestige of the kingdom. Moreover, the tenets of the Pushtimarg that allowed the maintenance of personal wealth, as long as it had been dedicated to Krishna, upheld the caste system, and sanctioned marriage and children were ideal for the Rajput rulers who could continue to live their lives without any significant alterations. Wealth, status and progeny were very important aspects of Rajput life and finding a Vaishnava path that endorsed these trappings must have seemed ideal to the worldly Hindu kings. The various apparent advantages in adopting the Pushtimarg is perhaps what prompted many Rajput princes to become members of the community in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

For the longest time Mewar, for example, had been a Shaivite state, but had enjoyed no major economic advantages as a result. Therefore in the mid seventeenth century, the rulers of Mewar announced that they had adopted the Pushtimarg as their personal religion, while Shiva remained the state deity.⁵⁵ The sect continued to receive land grants from the Mewar rulers through the eighteenth century. Kota had come into contact with the sect during Shrinathji’s brief sojourn there for two months in 1670 en route to Nathdvara. Fifty years later in 1719, the ruler of Kota was officially initiated into the Pushtimarg sect.⁵⁶ The rulers of Jaipur and Bundi also

⁵⁴ Peabody, p.67. By the early eighteenth century, four of the the *navanidhis* were settled in Mewar, three in Jaipur, one in Bundi and one in Surat in Gujarat. The one from Bundi was moved to Kota around 1740.

⁵⁵ Richardson, p.66.

⁵⁶ Taylor, p.21.

supported the community during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries,⁵⁷ engendering a group of powerful Rajput rulers with a shared sectarian affiliation. This solidarity was reasserted in real terms through the organization of a congregation of the *navanidhi* in Nathdvara in 1739-40, the first time they would be assembled after Vitthalnath's festival of 1581.⁵⁸ The ruler of Kota largely financed the event, "thereby visually displaying the importance of Kota as an active force within the larger Vallabha Sampradāya (Pushtimarg) community."⁵⁹ He attended the festivities himself along with the rulers of Mewar, Marwar, Bikaner and Kishangarh, all of whom would visit the shrine often.⁶⁰ The Pushtimarg provided the common ground, both in terms of belief and real physical opportunity, for political negotiation and collective action.⁶¹ The personal *svarūpas* of rulers also became sites of political maneuvering. In Kota, for instance, such a tutelary icon was lost in battle in 1720 and the ruler killed. The recovery of this *svarūpa* by his youngest son a few years later helped the latter establish supremacy over rival claimants and evince legitimacy through the "performance of archetypal exemplary actions"⁶² which included worshipping the icon. We could say that Krishna in his many Pushtimargi *svarūpas* or forms was occasionally co-opted for non-religious purposes.

The parallels between the life of Krishna as laid out in the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the biography of the icon Shrinathji are worth noting. As an infant, Krishna is whisked away from Mathura to the rural paradise of Gokula-Vrindavana where he spends his

⁵⁷ See footnote 54.

⁵⁸ Peabody, pp.62-3.

⁵⁹ Taylor, p.70.

⁶⁰ Amit Ambalal, *Krishna as Srinathji: Rajasthani Paintings from Nathdvara*, New York: Mapin, 1987, p.63.

⁶¹ Peabody suggests that the Kota rulers hoped to use the feeling of a shared community to galvanize political solidarity against the Marathas. p.63.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.39.

early years in the company of simple cowherds and peasant women. As a youth he must return to Mathura and fulfill his destiny by defeating Kamsa and restoring a reign of righteousness. But soon after, Krishna shifts his subjects to the newly constructed Dwarka in the middle of the western ocean, for their own safety.⁶³ And with this migration from Mathura, Krishna leaves the Braj region forever and is completely absorbed into the world of courtly intrigues, politics, battles and wealth accumulation. Mathura serves as a “transitional realm”⁶⁴ between two very distinct parts of Krishna’s life and “ne-er the twain shall meet.” Shrinathji is also based in the Braj region during the initial years,⁶⁵ cared for by local priests. But for his personal well-being, he journeys westwards in 1670, and after travelling through a few kingdoms, decides to settle down in Nathdvara. When Shrinathji leaves the Braj region, a sort mass exodus of the other icons follows and most of them also re-locate to Rajput-controlled states. What begins is a completely new phase in the life of Shrinathji and the other *svarūpas*—they become actors in political dramas and are drawn into royal maneuvering. For both Krishna and Shrinathji, heading west signifies becoming part of courtly life with new challenges, and the end of an earlier, perhaps simpler rural chapter. The passage from the verdant environs of Braj to the glittering mansions of Dwarka/Rajasthan, coupled with the acquisition of royal companions, signals a momentous transformation. The carefree cowherd becomes a prince with wealthy and powerful allies—the various Rajput rulers who were initiated into the Pushtimarg or had shown their backing for the community.

⁶³ Today Dwarka is approximately on the western most part of India’s coast in the state of Gujarat.

⁶⁴ Robert P. Goldman, ‘A City of the Heart: Epic Mathura and the Indian Imagination’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol.106, No.3 (Jul.—Sep., 1986), pp.471-483, p.481.

⁶⁵ Without an equivalent to Krishna’s initial departure from Mathura as an infant.

An Interest in the Heroic Krishna

The Pushtimarg is one of the many paths of *bhakti* that show the way towards Krishna. What is common to these diverse Krishna sects is the use of vernacular languages to address their specific Krishna and the emotionality of their expression:

All of the famous sixteenth-century *bhaktas*...agreed that the objective of a sincere *bhakta* should be the experience, expression, and transmission of *bhāva*, the attainment of actual emotional and attitudinal identity with one of the prototype *bhaktas*: Kṛṣṇa's parents, his friends, and the women he loved.⁶⁶

Most devotees address themselves to the child Krishna, enact the role of one of his cowherding playmates or revel in his erotic dalliances, but rarely refer to his courtly persona. One of the goals of this dissertation has been to address what I see as a preference, in the literary, artistic as well as popular culture of early modern North India,⁶⁷ for the adorable Krishna of the First Half of the Tenth Book rather than the heroic one from the Latter Half:

...but while the martial exploits of other gods captured the popular imagination, Kṛṣṇa's did not. The poets of Sūr's time all but ignored Kṛṣṇa's dealings with Kāṁsa, as well as the episodes of his later life in Dwārakā, treating these rather as a frame, almost an excuse, for that part of Kṛṣṇa's life which most singularly defined his character: his exile among the cowherds; his coming of age as herdsman to their cattle, companion to their sons, and as lover to their wives and daughters.⁶⁸

David Haberman has attempted to explain why the martial aspect of Krishna has had such limited appeal, attributing it to "Muslim dominance"⁶⁹ over North India from the thirteenth century onwards. In his opinion, the transformation wrought in the political landscape of North

⁶⁶ Richard Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1992, p.98.

⁶⁷ And as a result, in scholarship.

⁶⁸ Kenneth E. Bryant, *Poems to the Child-God: Structures and Strategies in the Poetry of Sūrdās*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1978, p.11.

⁶⁹ David L. Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānūrāga Bhakti Sādhana*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p.41.

India by the advent of Islamic rule had a lasting impact on Hindu religious life. The pre-Islamic conception of Hinduism involved a temple constructed by a ruler who had never been defeated in battle and there was predilection for the heroic incarnations of Vishnu such as the man-lion Narasimha and the boar Varaha. But the loss of political control and a political center meant that Hindus retreated from the political realm in their religious beliefs as well, turning to the young Krishna, a “god in exile” without any political overtones.

Hindu scripture makes it clear that there are problems for any Hindu living in a social system that fails to reflect Hindu *dharma*. Yet that is exactly what many Hindus at the beginning of the sixteenth century were forced to do. If, however, there was little hope of regaining control over the political sphere, there was serious need for an expression of Hindu *dharma* that placed the world of significant meaning far beyond that sphere controlled by the Muslims.⁷⁰

Haberman seems to believe that the amorous and playful Krishna was a coping mechanism for the defeated Hindus⁷¹ and that rural Braj was a world they could escape to, without any fear of being reminded of their failure.

There are many problems with such a theory, the most obvious being the “Muslim dominance” explanation for every socio-cultural phenomenon that occurs in India.⁷² North India was not a united entity before the thirteenth century and the idea that the Hindus had a political center to lose is untenable. Also, even if Krishna the heroic was abandoned, the worship of

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.43.

⁷¹ Norvin Hein has suggested that the turn towards the young Krishna occurred during Gupta rule (ca.320-550 CE) as a result of an inherent anxiety among Hindus to escape from the strictures imposed by the rigid caste system and other regulating social mechanisms. The Hindu child enjoys exceptional freedom and is permitted all sorts of spontaneous behavior until the age of seven or eight. It is therefore natural that Hindus longing for freedom would worship the very impetuous child Krishna and this would have the same ameliorative power as indulging in nostalgic reminiscences of their own childhoods. See ‘A Revolution in Kṛṣṇaism: The Cult of Gopāla’, *History of Religions*, Vol. 25, No. 4, Religion and Change: ASSR Anniversary Volume (May, 1986), pp.296-317.

⁷² Tony Stewart suggests, in the context of Gaudiya Viashnavas in sixteenth-century Bengal, that the empowerment and encouragement of Vaishnavas by Muslim authorities led to a turn away from the martial aspects of the incarnations of Vishnu towards the child Krishna and erotic theology surrounding Krishna and his dalliances with cowherd girls. See his ‘Religion in the Subjunctive: Vaiṣṇava Narrative, Sufi Counter-Narrative in Early Modern Bengal’ (forthcoming).

Rama, another princely incarnation of Vishnu with a prominent martial aspect, did not experience such a universal shift in the direction of his childhood and adolescence. Moreover, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are when regional Hindu kings in Rajasthan were patronizing the “composition of narratives commemorating a heroic past, in order to elaborate norms of heroic conduct for the present”⁷³ which included works describing the deeds of historical figures, both real and putative. Haberman’s theory is not corroborated by extant works of art and literature and the preference for the early part of Krishna’s life cannot be explained by the political vicissitudes of the Hindus in North India.

It is probably impossible to conclude why one aspect of a god is more attractive and appealing than another and maybe the question should be posed differently: Who was engaging with Krishna the warrior and politician and for what reasons? I believe an answer can be found if we direct our attention towards the Rajputs who backed the Pushtimarg during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This new support base would have a completely different set of concerns than most previous members of the sect (and Krishna devotees more generally) and might be motivated to express their commitment to the deity in a distinctive manner according to their personal sensibilities. Perhaps a Rajput prince found it more appropriate to focus on Krishna’s martial aspect than his childhood play and fixed on the Latter Half on the Tenth Book as the ideal vehicle to convey his piety. There are no restrictions in the Pushtimarg on which aspect of Krishna should be worshipped and *Subodhinī*, Vallabhacharya’s commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, clearly “emphasises the freedom of the worshipper, who may imagine Krishna as a friend, a lover, a superior, or as his or her own child. The devotee’s inner, affective world is his own business, as is his choice of devotional practices; he may

⁷³ Ramya Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Past in India c.1500-1900*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007, p.67.

request guidance from his preceptor (*guru*) in these matters, but he is not subject to censorship.”⁷⁴ It is Krishna in his heroic incarnation, leading victorious armies, gathering spoils of war, marrying suitable princesses and producing heirs that a Rajput prince would view as a model he could identify with and aspire to. This archetypal role had traditionally been filled by Rama who is often regarded as the most righteous man and an ideal king. But in light of Shrinathji becoming the supreme deity for many Rajputs, it is possible that they would turn to Krishna and make him their exemplar. Moreover, Krishna fights many more battles,⁷⁵ marries many more princesses⁷⁶ and has many more sons⁷⁷ than Rama, all of which were extremely important activities in a Rajput prince’s life.

I am not constructing a general hypothesis about the impact of the Pushtimarg on the lives of Rajputs but rather suggesting that since the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* begins with a salutation to Shrinathji, we might consider it a Pushtimarg inspired manuscript that was produced at the behest of a Rajput patron who was a member of the community.⁷⁸ Visual culture is an integral part of the Pushtimarg ethos because “the true devotee is *shaukeen* too, a connoisseur in every

⁷⁴ Tryna Lyons, *The Artists of Nathdwara: The Practice of Painting in Rajasthan*, Ahmedabad: Mapin and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004, p.17.

⁷⁵ Rama only fights one major battle against Ravana, to vanquish whom he was incarnated.

⁷⁶ Rama’s only wife Sita spends most of their married life either in exile with him or exiled from him. Krishna on the other hand is believed to have 16,108 wives and he assumes as many forms so that he can enjoy married bliss with each of them simultaneously.

⁷⁷ Rama has twin sons while each of Krishna’s wives gives birth to ten.

⁷⁸ One must acknowledge the possibility that we are dealing with non-royal patrons and that the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and its copies were commissioned by merchants, for example. Merchants constituted a large and wealthy support base of Pushtimarg from its inception, particularly in Gujarat. See Saha, ‘Movement of *Bhakti*.’ Dwarka, as we know, is situated in Gujarat and it is in the Latter Half of the Tenth Book that Krishna’s story moves to Dwarka. Perhaps a Pushtimargi from Gujarat was more interested in Krishna when he lived in Gujarat, rather than the Braj region. My thanks to John S. Hawley (Columbia University) for pointing out the importance of location. This is yet another path (which requires further research) from which we might approach the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, thereby bolstering my argument that there are indeed many likely scenarios in which so-called Malwa paintings may have existed.

field.”⁷⁹ According to Debra Diamond, an affiliation with trans-regional Vaishnava networks influenced the content and scale of paintings commissioned in the Rajput kingdom of Marwar in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁸⁰ The ruler took initiation into the Pushtimarg in 1765, after which themes from Krishna’s life are frequently represented in illustrated manuscripts instead of royal pastimes. “The new maharaja’s (Vijai Singh) ardent interest in religion was expressed, moreover, in illustrated manuscripts of unprecedented size.”⁸¹ I am hinting that the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* (and its copies) is the result of similar socio-religious dynamics, where the sponsorship and/or adoption of a new deity by a patron led to fresh subjects appearing in paintings, in this case Krishna the warrior and politician. 1672 is when Shrinathji makes his home in Rajasthan and engenders a process of widespread patronage of the Pushtimarg among the Rajput princes and the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* is dated to 1688, providing us with a timeline that fits with my idea that a Rajput follower of the Pushtimarg patronized the manuscript.

Even if we consider the possibility that the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* was made in Malwa rather than Rajasthan proper the theory does not need to be altered. Many of the Rajput princes located in Malwa hailed from the very kingdoms in Rajasthan whose rulers were recent converts to the Pushtimarg⁸² and these non-resident Rajputs were undoubtedly aware of and connected to what was occurring in their homeland. Also, the geographical proximity of the Malwa province to the Rajput kingdoms of Kota, Bundi and Mewar that border it meant sufficient contact between them

⁷⁹ Ambalal, p.11.

⁸⁰ Debra Diamond et al., *Garden and Cosmos: The Royal Paintings of Jodhpur*, Washington D.C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2008.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.21.

⁸² Raghubir Singh, *Malwa in Transition or A Century of Anarchy: The First Phase 1698-1765*, Bombay: D. B. Taraporevala, Sons & Co., 1936.

for religious ideas to be exchanged. As mentioned earlier, all of these kingdoms evince an inclination towards the Pushtimarg by the end of the seventeenth century⁸³ even if the rulers (except Mewar) had not officially converted. Moreover, we are told that the founder of the sect travelled extensively in Malwa during his lifetime and gained many followers long before Shrinathji's westward migration.⁸⁴ Hence, we may assume that the presence of the Pushtimarg was strong in Malwa around the time that the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* was produced.

Religious Merit

Alongside the idea of finding an appropriate Pushtimargi role model in Krishna, the Rajputs may have been inspired by the opportunity to gain religious merit by re-telling his story because “the Bhāgavata (Purāṇa) is a literary substitute for Kṛṣṇa, and by reading, hearing and reciting the text itself one is interacting directly with God. Indeed the Bhāgavata goes to great lengths to reinforce the point that hearing, chanting and meditating about Kṛṣṇa in his absence are as potent as interacting with Kṛṣṇa in person.”⁸⁵ Thus the text is capable of standing in for the god and engaging with it is equivalent to being in contact with Krishna. It is a powerful entity in and of itself. Of the entire *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* it is the Tenth Book that is the most well known and popular and for a member of the Pushtimarg sect, where Krishna is the supreme deity, the Tenth Book takes on a completely different significance, enjoying an exalted and almost venerated status.

The last lines of the Tenth Book repeat what is said in other parts of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*:

⁸³ By giving shelter to the *svarūpas*.

⁸⁴ Saha, p.304.

⁸⁵ Edwin F. Bryant, *Krishna: The Beautiful Legend of God (Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa Book X)*, London and New York: Penguin, 2003, p.xxxi.

By listening to, chanting and contemplating on the charming stories of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa every moment, man develops the devotion which leads him to the (supreme) sphere of the Lord... Even rulers of the earth have left their kingdom and retired to the forest for (the performance of austerities with the object of) gaining that eternal realm.⁸⁶

This is the *phalaśruti* or a verse that details the fruits that are to be obtained from involving oneself with the Krishna narrative and it is clear that performance in its broadest sense, which includes recitation, illustration, composing texts and enactment, is emphasized. According to Philip Lutgendorf:

Communicating such texts to a predominantly illiterate audience necessitated frequent public recitation, and listeners were encouraged to memorize and repeat sections of them. All of these objectives are reflected in the texts, especially in the *phalsruti* verses, which detail the rewards attendant on hearing, reciting, or copying a Purana.⁸⁷

“Performing” the life of Krishna was an important way of making sure that people had access to it and it is not just the actor/author/artist but also the viewer/reader/listener who could obtain merit by sharing the experience. Even the act of copying a manuscript of the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* or causing it to be produced would have been considered sufficient to secure benefits.

One of the last partially legible sentences in the now damaged colophon of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* is, in my opinion, the *phalaśruti* (Plate i.4). It reads “*śravana darasa kari kari bhayo darasana sva...*” which means “hearing seeing again and again one obtains sight (“of the divine” if the last word is *svarūpa*).” The manuscript self-consciously declares its own worth as a conduit to Krishna. It is interesting to note that here, rather than reciting or chanting, the modes of

⁸⁶ C. L. Goswami, *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, Part II, Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 2006, p.515.

⁸⁷ Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the ‘Ramcaritmanas’ of Tulsidas*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, p.57. The idea of rewards accruing from repeating stories is also discussed in Kavita Singh, ‘To Show, To See, To Tell, To Know: Patuas, Bhopas, and their Audiences’ in Jyotindra Jain, ed., *Picture Showmen: Insights into the Narrative Tradition in Indian Art*, Bombay: Marg, 1998, pp.100-112.

performance that are emphasized are seeing and hearing. This might give us a clue about how the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* was meant to be used—the images would be seen and the stories heard.

Reading the text is not mentioned.

The formalized procedure for performing the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is contained in the *Bhāgavata Māhātmya*, a text that announces the *Purāṇa*’s greatness in six chapters.⁸⁸ According to John S. Hawley, it was not composed much before the early decades of the eighteenth century.⁸⁹ In the *Māhātmya*, *bhakti* is personified as a beautiful woman whose two sons, Wisdom and Self-control, are in terrible distress and can only be revived by a chanting of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Narada, the itinerant sage who roams heaven and earth, decides to organize this performance. In the present age of darkness or Kali Yuga, where life has become extremely degenerate, the most efficacious way of performing it would be over a seven-day period or a *bhāgavata saptāha* (“*Bhāgavata* week”). But during the event, what is actually recited is the glory of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* or the *Bhāgavata Māhātmya* which includes “a reminder of how Krishna infused the *Bhāgavata* with his own presence when he departed from this world”⁹⁰ to the extent that “it became a tangible image of himself.”⁹¹

There is a *phalaśruti* verse as well which is significant for our analysis because of the comparisons made with royal sacrifices:

The Bhāgavata-Śāstra alone proclaims loudly its capacity to grant Liberation.
That house itself in which Śrīmad Bhāgavata is read everyday is actually
converted into a scared place and drives away the sins of those dwelling in it.
Thousands of Aśvamedha Yajñas and hundreds of Vājapeya sacrifices cannot

⁸⁸ John S. Hawley, ‘The Transit of Bhakti’ (forthcoming), p.3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.21. Hawley also discusses that in the first quarter of the eighteenth century there is a “sudden burst” in extant dated manuscripts of the *Māhātmya*. p.31.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.10.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.12.

compare (in their efficacy even) with one-sixteenth of a reading of Śrīmad Bhāgavata.⁹²

In the words of the *Māhātmya*, the rewards to be derived from even a partial reading of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are greater than those obtained from a thousand Ashvamedha and a hundred Vajapeya sacrifices. This is undoubtedly hyperbole, but I believe it serves a purpose: the two sacrifices mentioned are royal sacrifices that require great manpower and wealth for their completion. The Vajapeya is one of the main Vedic royal sacrifices, but the Ashvamedha is epic in its import, organized by Rama's father in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and by the Pandavas in the *Mahābhārata*. It can only be conducted by an undisputed sovereign who has defeated all challenges to his superiority. This is tested by sending a royal horse to different kingdoms and if it returns unmolested and unopposed, the ruler is deemed unmatched. Any king that tries to seize the horse during its peregrinations is compelled to fight the ruler to whom it belongs.⁹³ It is probable that for a Rajput, the Ashvamedha was the ultimate expression of power and a means by which to be counted alongside the greatest mythical kings. But according to the *Māhātmya*, a ruler would gain even greater celebrity and be recognized as supreme by simply performing the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. It seems that the *phalaśruti* has royal patrons in mind because no ordinary person would have the resources for either the Vajapeya or the Ashvamedha rituals. And the message is clear: immense fame is in store for the Rajput prince if he engages with just a part of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

In light of the fact that Rajputs might have been interested in the princely Krishna over and above the cowherd because of the personality of the god, and after becoming affiliated with the Pushtimarg sect, it is possible that a text like the *Māhātmya*, with its appeal to royal

⁹² C. L. Goswami, *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, Part I, Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 2006, p.18.

⁹³ From reading many *Amar Chitra Katha* comic books as a child.

sensibilities, would have also motivated a Rajput ruler to commission an illustrated manuscript (and/or a Brajbhasha text) of the Latter Half of the Tenth Book. Norbert Peabody has argued in favor of Rajputs giving weight to “exemplary actions” as reinforcing the right to rule⁹⁴ and patronizing an illustrated manuscript that depicts the life of Krishna would be precisely such an endeavor that would allow the patron to gain religious merit while displaying his worth as a ruler who is pious and cultured.⁹⁵

Conclusion

This chapter asks us to reconsider the standard style-centric methodology that has been adopted for the study of Malwa manuscripts. Instead of tracing the teleology of the Malwa style and determining where and how the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and its copies fit, it is more productive if we examine the significance of the subject matter of these manuscripts. Such an approach will not tell a tale of isolation and lack of information about the patrons and provenance of Malwa manuscripts. Rather the illustrated manuscripts in question will be viewed within a much broader religio-cultural context and can be linked to contemporary trends in art and literature.

The heroic Krishna of the Latter Half of the Tenth Book, depicted in the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and its copies, is less frequently visible in early modern art and literature than the child and youth of the *bhakti* poets. Perhaps it is a coincidence that this Krishna appears just a few years after the main Pushtimarg icon of Shrinathji makes its way into the Rajput heartland on a manuscript that bears a salutation to the same godhead. The Kanoria *Bhāgavata* might not

⁹⁴ Peabody, p.39.

⁹⁵ It is also completely possible that religious feeling is not part of the picture at all. The Mughal emperor Akbar commissioned Persian translations and illustrated manuscripts of the Hindu epics *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, not prompted by any desire to obtain merit because he was not a Hindu. See A. K. Das, ‘An Introductory Note on the Emperor Akbar’s *Ramayana* and its Miniatures’ in Robert Skelton et al., eds., *Facets of Indian Art: A Symposium held at the Victoria and Albert Museum on 26, 27, 28 April and 1 May 1982*, London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1986, pp.94-104 for information about Akbar’s commissions and a discussion of his *Rāmāyaṇa*.

be the first illustrated manuscript to depict the Latter Half of the Tenth Book with Krishna as the insuperable warrior who inhabits lavish palaces.⁹⁶ But there is a particular concatenation of events surrounding its production that were never seen before, making this a unique historical moment.

In the field of literature, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are when the Rajputs were extremely interested in their own heroic past and patronized literary works that celebrated it “in order to elaborate norms of heroic conduct for the present.”⁹⁷ Is there a better role model than Krishna, the brave, canny and victorious warrior of the Latter Half of the Tenth Book? One should also note the importance of the fact that 1687 is the first time that a Brajbhasha version of the Latter Half of the Tenth Book is composed in North India, even though the First Half had been around for some time. Moreover, a second text, the Mahananda Latter Half, which is inscribed behind the illustrations of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, is composed just one year later. The fact that this second half of Krishna’s life becomes available in the vernacular at this exact instant for the first time is worth marking.⁹⁸ Can we see this as proof of a more widespread demand? Obviously the copies made after the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* indicate that there was some requirement beyond a single incidental manuscript. There is no extant evidence to suggest that any of the earlier illustrated Latter Halves were ever copied. All this occurring just around the time when Shrinathji is transposed to the midst of the Rajputs, many of whom support and patronize the Pushtimarg sect cannot be an accident. While I concede that it is nigh impossible to

⁹⁶ One is the CPS manuscript discussed earlier in the dissertation. A second set, now dispersed, is believed to be from Mewar from the first half of the seventeenth century which depicts the First and Latter Halves on double sided, horizontally oriented folios with small pictures and a lot of text. See Brooklyn Museum 83.164.2 for an episode from the Latter Half.

⁹⁷ Sreenivasan, cited earlier.

⁹⁸ There are a few Brajbhasha labels in the double-sided Mewar set but not a complete text.

establish a direct cause and effect relationship between Rajput princes converting to the Pushtimarg and the production of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, I posit that the manuscript was born as a result of the cultural trends outlined above.⁹⁹

My hypothesis would be strengthened if I could show that there exist other illustrated Latter Half manuscripts, perhaps from other courts, which are also dedicated to Shrinathji and were made around the same time as the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*. This is an avenue of investigation I hope to pursue in greater detail after my dissertation is complete. I have found pages from an illustrated Tenth Book from Bikaner from the first part of the eighteenth century¹⁰⁰ that showcases episodes from the Latter Half (Metropolitan Museum 2005.361, Fralin Museum of Art 1997.15 and Christie's sale 2640, March 20th 2012, Lot 257) but have not yet unearthed its first or colophon page that would carry the salutation. A few Latter Half illustrations from mid eighteenth-century Kota are also extant, but again I do not possess the relevant details. What I do know is that the copies made after the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* also acknowledge Shrinathji.

I am making some guesses here: first, the patron of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* is a Rajput prince or noble; second, he was affiliated with the Pushtimarg sect; third, he would be interested in the more martial aspect of Krishna's life; and fourth, he would commission an illustrated manuscript to represent it. Possibly I will be compelled to make some modifications as more information becomes available, but I do not believe that any of my conjectures are so far-fetched as to be discarded at this stage. I am more circumspect about assuming that Malwa manuscripts are the output of a court-sponsored workshop as this statement has handicapped their study for decades. A cultural history approach eschews a complete reliance on purely political history and

⁹⁹ In a similar way, there are multiple copies of a First Half manuscript which is also dedicated to Shrinathji. These are probably the product of similar cultural trends. But it is the unusual nature of the Latter Half, coupled with the first appearance of a vernacular text of it that particularly interests me.

¹⁰⁰ I assume this is one set, though further research could reveal the existence of multiple similar sets.

takes into account what was occurring in the fields of religion, literature and the arts. I too am drawing my conclusions after examining the broader trends in society as a whole in order to show that Malwa manuscripts were active participants in the world they inhabited and their analysis is essential for a fuller understanding of early modern North India.

CONCLUSION: THE LIFE OF A NARRATIVE

The Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is arguably the single most important narrative in early modern North India and has been recounted using a variety of media and languages. Nearly every Rajput court possessed illustrated manuscripts on the subject, different communities produced textual adaptations, there is a long commentarial tradition based on it and it is still enacted and recited throughout India. Traditionally thought to be written in Sanskrit, the Tenth Book is set up as a dialogue where questions from King Parikshit prompt the great sage Shuka to narrate various incidents from Krishna's life. Rather than straightforward narrative, this dialogue framework creates the impression of a conversation where the order of events, descriptions and specific details are not fixed. It is the very structure of the work that imparts flexibility to it because we are not given the story of Krishna as is, but told Shuka's version as he repeats it to Parikshit. And even though Shuka's account is authoritative and erudite, it is not the original and only possible Tenth Book. A recitation of the story to another audience, where different questions are posed by the listeners, would mean a new sequence of episodes and changed imagery. Moreover, Shuka is not the only story-teller who might be asked about Krishna, and each narrator will undoubtedly present the material in his or her own way. The traditional Sanskrit Tenth Book is therefore just one of many. Keeping this in mind I choose to think in terms of re-tellings where no single Tenth Book is lofted onto a pedestal and regarded as superior to all others. Each and every Tenth Book is significant for the people engaging with it and scholarship must approach the many re-tellings with this attitude.

In my dissertation I focus on the narrative of Krishna as the warrior and politician from the Latter Half of the Tenth Book as portrayed in the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and its copies. This affords the opportunity to examine three distinct re-tellings of the narrative—the Brajbhasha text

(Mahananda Latter Half) inscribed on the manuscript's 116 leaves, its cycle of illustrations and the copies which are never exact facsimiles after the model. The Brajbhasha text is based on the Sanskrit, the illustrations on the Brajbhasha text, and the copies on the illustrations, and we would assume that they all tell the same story. Occasionally, however, the narrative is altered to the point that the account in the copy images, the latest re-telling, bears little resemblance to the Sanskrit one, on which they are ultimately based. That we are dealing with a direct chain of transfer is not in question: the author of the Brajbhasha text displays an obvious awareness and familiarity with the Sanskrit text as he follows its succession of events and includes the names of dozens of pilgrimage sites, for example, in the same order as the Sanskrit. The artist of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* clearly indicates his source as he presents details that are not found in the Sanskrit but only in the Brajbhasha text and omits what is left out in the latter. Similarly the copy artist's debt to the illustrations of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* is apparent.¹

Despite this interdependence, however, the author and artists do not hesitate to rework the narrative to meet their own particular requirements, thereby producing a singular re-telling every time. We therefore have the unique opportunity to study the transformations the narrative undergoes at every stage of its translation and trace its "life" as it incarnates in text, image and copy image. The biographical approach has been successfully used in the study of objects which are no longer viewed as static unchanging entities. Just as the physical appearance of an object may change over time through use and wear and tear, the meaning of the object is also altered according to the context in which it exists or the manner in which it is used. Richard Davis, for example, is interested in the lives of Hindu religious images and the history he investigates is not

¹ Of course, at every stage there may have existed a work that we are not aware of now, such as another vernacular text on which the Mahananda Latter Half depended or a different model manuscript for the copies, but I must draw my conclusions using available extant material.

just about patron, period and artist, but how an icon from a temple means something completely different when placed inside a museum. Objects have a story to tell beyond the initial moment of their creation:

But the later lives of Indian religious images and the ways in which these images come to be relocated and revalorized, I argue, also become intrinsic to their significance.²

A similar approach is adopted by Barry Flood in his discussion of elements from Hindu temples reused in the making of “conquest mosques” in north-west India in the first part of the thirteenth century³ and by Tapati Guha-Thakurta in her examination of the changing perceptions of an object as revealed in the mass of scholarly and popular writing that grows around it.⁴ The approach has found proponents in textual studies as well; Ramya Sreenivasan explores the “multiple narratives” about Padmini, a legendary queen of a kingdom in Rajasthan, and shows how different social groups emphasize particular aspects of the story to suit their own purposes⁵ while Philip Lutgendorf investigates the most popular vernacular re-telling of the story of Rama as it is performed and demonstrates how the epic hero is continually revitalized in this genre.⁶

I am not concerned with the biography of a tangible physical object where changes are read in its appearance or in the mode of its utilization. Rather, alterations have to be gleaned from how the narrative is presented and how it makes meaning in its various embodiments. The

² Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999, c1997, pp.54-55.

³ Barry Flood, ‘Refiguring Iconoclasm in the Early Indian Mosque’, Anne McClanan and Jeff Johnson, eds., *Negating the Image: Case Studies in Iconoclasm*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005, pp.15-40.

⁴ Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

⁵ Ramya Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Pasts in India c.1500-1900*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007.

⁶ Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the ‘Ramcaritmanas’ of Tulsidas*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

basic elements of a story usually remain the same—the legend of Padmini, for example, stays unchanged in its multiple narratives:

...she was so renowned for her beauty that Alauddin Khalji, the Sultan of Delhi, was determined to obtain her for himself. Unable at first to conquer the formidable fortress of Chitor ruled by Padmini's husband, Alauddin offered to withdraw his troops if he could but catch a glimpse of her. In fact, as it happened, he could only gaze at her reflected image because the Rajput queen would not appear before a stranger. Entranced by her beauty, and even more determined to obtain her, the sultan tricked her husband into captivity. The Rajputs plotted their king's release...An enraged Alauddin laid siege again to the fortress. Faced with certain defeat, the Rajput women led by Padmini immolated themselves. Their men were killed in a final battle...⁷

Each of the many narratives that draw on this story, however, “reflects the social locations and ideology of those who appropriate it.”⁸ Sixteenth-century Sufi adaptations focus on the hero's (Ratansen, Padmini's husband) attempts to court and marry the queen as representing a spiritual journey where the heroine embodies Truth. The emphasis in slightly later Rajasthani accounts, on the other hand, is on Rajput honor. In modern day *Amar Chitra Katha* comic books, Padmini becomes the epitome of Indian womanhood because of her virtue and courage.⁹ These and other re-tellings of Padmini story present the same events but by giving weight to distinct aspects or providing a philosophical gloss, each narrative becomes singular. Or, put in a different way, each narrative becomes a re-telling. What the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and its copies offer us is the unique opportunity to examine a connected series rather than discrete re-tellings like the various Padmini ones, whose only link is the shared narrative. A single narrative has a remarkable life over the course of approximately two decades, and in my dissertation I have explored its

⁷ Sreenivasan, p.1.

⁸ Paula Richman, ‘Introduction’, in Paula Richman, ed., *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991, p.4.

⁹ Sreenivasan, *Many Lives*.

significance at each successive stage, detailing the factors that affected its form and content, the people who engaged with it and how context had a role to play in its transformations.

Mahananda systematically removes the descriptive details and philosophical passages found in the Sanskrit Latter Half giving rise to an action-oriented narrative in Brajbhasha. The absence of lines exalting Krishna suggests that the author is not interested in producing a text that will remind readers of Krishna's divinity through esoteric expositions. Rather he describes the actions of the protagonist and portrays him as a heroic figure. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, this is the period when Rajputs were patronizing heroic narratives to serve as models for the present and the Mahananda Latter Half should be viewed as part of such a milieu. The text has a very different character from the Sanskrit where philosophy and action are equally present, and lends itself easily to pictorialization. This raises the possibility that the Mahananda Latter Half was always intended for illustration and the author made choices accordingly. Such an observation is especially relevant when we consider the fact that in every known instance, the text accompanies paintings and never occurs independently.

The illustrations that embody the Mahananda Latter Half are complex, dynamic and very striking. The bright colors, crowds of figures, multiple episodes and numerous page divisions convey a sense of energy and excitement and invite the viewer to engage with them. The narrative itself has to be carefully decoded—it is rarely ever linear and there is no recognizable logic to the way it travels across the page. It can only be deciphered by a knowing viewer. The artist is undeniably a master of the art of story-telling and creates complicated picture puzzles that challenge the eye. An accomplished viewer, however, will learn to read the artist's clues and perceive the helpful patterns he inserts into the illustrations that establish links between paintings of a similar subject.

In the Sanskrit *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* text connections are made across chapters and even books through devices such as prolepses and flashbacks. Associations are made in the Mahananda Latter Half as well: at the beginning of the the story of Shalva, one is told that he was a friend of Shishupala's and had accompanied him to his failed wedding. Shishupala's death at the hands of Krishna prompts Shalva to seek revenge. This information in Chapter 76 will cause the reader's mind to travel back over twenty chapters to the abduction of Rukmini, where Shishupala was the original intended bridegroom, and ponder the insult. The next stop will be Chapter 74 where Shishupala meets his demise, before the reader continues with Chapter 76. In the illustrations, however, the encounter between Shalva and the Yadavas is visually linked to the many other battles in the manuscript because they all use the register format and no reference is made to the friendship between Shalva and Shishupala. The artist of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* creates his own pictorial language and employs strategies like repetition of page compositions to draw together certain illustrations in the viewer's mind. Such links between chapters (and across manuscripts) forged by the artist are not stressed in the Mahananda Latter Half text and the experience of looking at the illustrations brings to light different narrative nuances than reading the text.

The narrative alterations we encounter in the copy manuscripts are not always as subtle. In some cases, by modifying the size of a figure or refashioning the spatial arrangements, the copy painting does not deliver as much of the story as its model. Occasionally, however, the change is very marked and results in a discrepancy between the narrative contained in the text and that communicated by the image. If the text states that Krishna and Balarama run away from the battlefield but the illustration depicts them fighting their foes, one of the two is not as it should be and it is natural to assume that the copy artist, who was probably not reading the story

but referring solely to the model images, is the culprit. It is possible though that the copy artist is editing the painting so that it does indeed tell a separate story. Perhaps he is not making a mistake or misunderstanding the content, but purposefully transforming the narrative. Despite the narrative incongruity, we cannot jump to the conclusion that the copy artist is wrong and must consider whether he is engaged in re-telling the tale for a different viewer.

Maintaining very rigid rules about what the copy artist should and should not alter is problematic as it allows no room for artistic agency and can leave us with only a partial understanding of the copy manuscript's specific context and function as distinct from its model. But on the other hand, is there never an instance when the copy artist's actions must be pinned down as detrimental to the manuscript's story-telling function? For example, under what circumstances would it be tolerable that Krishna should use his discus to decapitate his foster father as he does in the National Museum First Half? This is a vexed point about defining the limits of creativity when the artist's product is not "original" but based on something that existed previously. To what degree is artistic freedom acceptable and when does a visual re-telling go too far?

The very existence of copies, one set probably made a hundred years after the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*, is indicative of the circulation of manuscripts¹⁰ and transmission of the narrative. Given the narrative variations, an illustrated manuscript can transmit two separate re-tellings of certain episodes, one through text and the other via illustrations. Certain narrative motifs in the illustrations acquire a life of their own independent of the text and are widely disseminated with the help of "diffusion mechanisms that we do not yet fully understand."¹¹ For example, the lion

¹⁰ Or artists or patrons.

¹¹ Allison Busch, *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p.180.

that attacks Vasudeva as he ferries the newborn Krishna across the Yamuna to Gokula occurs in a sixteenth-century vernacular Tenth Book but then occurs regularly in paintings as late as the nineteenth century,¹² even when it is not mentioned in the text that accompanies the illustration. These paintings are not all in the same style or made at one location but distributed throughout North India. Occasionally the lion appears to be walking calmly beside Vasudeva rather than molesting him,¹³ adding a further twist in the tale. On the other hand, Krishna killing his foster father is an element that does not seem to persist or we would have another Oedipus on our hands! The dispersal of motifs is evidence that early modern North India was a connected and networked space where people, objects and ideas were not static or confined to one location.¹⁴

I believe an interdisciplinary approach is most productive in order to gain a fuller understanding of the socio-cultural conditions in which manuscripts like the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* were making their way. The Tenth Book has typically been analyzed from two separate perspectives: as a major theological and devotional document by scholars of religious literature, and as the subject of illustrated manuscripts by art historians. Doing away with this text-image binary, my dissertation demonstrates the importance of considering literary and artistic traditions as complementary discourses. The Kanoria *Bhāgavata* is an artwork that generates information about style, provenance, dating and so on. But it is also a cultural text and part of a much broader historical moment which cannot be grasped without turning our attention to literary production as well. The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries witness an unprecedented proliferation in the production of Tenth Books among various social groups in North India, a

¹² See Brooklyn Museum X689.4.

¹³ See LACMA M.81.271.13.

¹⁴ This idea is discussed in Allison Busch's *Poetry of Kings* and Molly Emma Aitken's *The Intelligence of Tradition in Rajput Court Painting*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010.

phenomenon that has not yet been conceptualized by scholars. We have, for the first time, complete re-tellings of it in Brajbhasha as well as Persian, the two major literary languages of this period, done in courtly, urban as well as Vaishnava sectarian milieus. The significance of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* and its copies can be fully understood only if they are viewed alongside these many different kinds of cultural texts created during this period, that deal with the Tenth Book.¹⁵

This project also tries to understand the implications of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*'s subject matter and the salutation it contains to Shrinathji. Given the historical juncture at which the manuscript is produced, we cannot regard an interest in the heroic and urbane Krishna as purely incidental. Shrinathji re-located to Rajasthan in 1672 after which many Rajputs became his followers. I posit that one such Pushtimargi Rajput prince found the martial and courtly aspects of his elected deity particularly appealing as a model he could emulate. Motivated by this interest and by the desire to obtain religious merit by re-telling Krishna's story, the devout and cultured warrior sponsored the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* which was completed in 1688. My intention is to make a connection between a patron's sectarian affiliations and the content of an illustrated manuscript he commissioned. In broad terms, I am relating art and religion based on the evidence contained in the artwork and moving beyond the confines of the Kanoria *Bhāgavata*'s Malwa appellation.

Natalie Kampen pointed out to me that the "placeless-ness" of Malwa manuscripts is actually a blessing; lack of definite information about a patronizing court or region of production that has handicapped their study for decades can be helpful if utilized properly. An artwork's

¹⁵ Francesca Orsini's *Tellings, not Texts* conference (SOAS, London, June 2009) adopted this approach in examining the literary culture of North India from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. I co-organized a workshop at Heidelberg University (October 2013) whose main objective was such a broad-based understanding of "translations" of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. This is an on-going project.

pre-existing ties to a stylistic group, a patron and the latter's socio-political history influence the directions of investigation and, with only a few exceptions,¹⁶ become the limits beyond which an analysis does not proceed. An examination of Mughal painting, for example, usually takes into account other Mughal manuscripts, the personality of the commissioning ruler and the chronicle of his reign. But what are Malwa manuscripts' established links, apart from the stylistic one that scholars have used to define the group (or groups)? Even this bond is not a firm one as scholars have recognized the existence of multiple styles within the body of manuscripts. Acknowledging the fact that the Kanoria *Bhāgavata* does not have to be situated within a defined set of relationships has allowed me to move beyond provenance, dating and chronology, the only avenues of inquiry ever used in the context of Malwa manuscripts, and search for other ways in which it makes meaning. This dissertation demonstrates the importance of researching Malwa manuscripts and provides a roadmap for the exploration of other placeless artworks.

¹⁶ Aitken's *Intelligence of Tradition* and Vidya Dehejia's 'The Treatment of Narrative in Jagat Singh's "Ramayana": A Preliminary Study', *Artibus Asiae*, Vol.56, No.3/4 (1996), pp.303-324 are two that I have referred to in this dissertation. While the former moves beyond the traditional pre-existing relationships into new realms, the latter concentrates on the visual material to understand artistic strategy.

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